

LITTLE ENGLAND

SHEILA KAYE-SMITH



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To Annie from Mother
With loving wishes
for her birthday
Year of Grace 1919.



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LITTLE ENGLAND

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

SUSSEX GORSE (*Third Edition*)

THE CHALLENGE TO SIRIUS

THE TRAMPING METHODIST

STARBRACE

SPELL LAND

ISLE OF THORNS

THREE AGAINST THE WORLD

SAMUEL RICHARDSON

JOHN GALSWORTHY ("Writers of
the Day" Series)

WILLOW'S FORGE AND OTHER
POEMS

LITTLE ENGLAND

BY
SHEILA KAYE-SMITH



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LITTLE ENGLAND

PART I

TOM

I

FOUR roads in Sussex mark out a patch of country that from the wooded, sea-viewing hills behind Dallington slips down over fields and ponds and spinneys to the marshes of Hailsham and Horse Eye. The North Road, slatting the heights with its pale, hard streak, runs from far Rye to further Lewes, a road of adventures and distances, passing Woods Corner and Three Cups Corner, Punnetts Town and Cade Street, till it joins the London Road at Cross-in-Hand. The South Road borders the marsh, sometimes dry on the shelving ground above it, sometimes soggy on the marsh level, or perhaps sheeted with the overflow of the Hurst Haven. It comes from Senlac and Hastings, and after skirting the flats, crosses the River Cuckmere, and runs tamely into Lewes, where all roads meet. The East Road is short and shaggy, running through many woods, from the North Road, which it joins at Woods Corner, to the throws at Boreham Street. Along this road is a string of farms—Cowlease, and Padgham, and Slivericks, mangy holdings for the most part, with copses running wild and fields of thistles, doors agape and walls a-tumble, and gable-ends stooping towards the ponds. The West Road is grass-grown, and in July St. John's wort and rest-harrow straggle in the ruts and make the

dust smell sickly-sweet. It forks from the North Road at Punnetts Town, and runs through Rushlake Green and the Foul Mile to Hailsham in the south.

In the swale of the day, towards Easter-time, the Reverend Mr. Sumption was walking along the North Road from Dallington to Woods Corner. Dallington is the mother-parish of the country bounded by the Four Roads, though there is also a church at Brownbread Street, in charge of a curate. Mr. Sumption had no truck with either Rector or curate, for he was a minister of the Particular Baptists, who had a Bethel in Sunday Street, as the lane was called which linked the East Road with one that trailed in and out of farms and woods to the throws at Bucksteep Manor. Not that the sect of the Particular Baptists flourished in the parish of Dallington, but the Bethel being midway between the church and the chapel, a fair congregation could be raked in on wet Sundays from the middle district, where doctrine, like most things in that land of farms, was swung by the weather.

The Reverend Mr. Sumption was a big, handsome man of forty-five, and wore a semi-clerical suit of greenish-black, with a shabby hat and a dirty collar. His face was brown, darkening round the jaw with a beard that wanted the razor twice a day, but did not get it. His eyes were dark and sunk deep in his head, gleaming like deep ditch-water under eyebrows as smooth and black as broom-pods. His teeth were very white, and his hair was grey and curly like a fleece.

As he walked he muttered to himself, and from time to time cracked the joints of his fingers with a loud rapping sound. These two habits helped form the local opinion that he was "queer," an opinion bolstered by more evidence than is usual in such cases. Women standing in their cottage doors noticed him twice halt and stoop—once to pick up a beetle which was laboriously crawling from ditch to ditch, another time to pick

up a swede dropped from some farm-cart. He carefully put the beetle on the opposite bank—"Near squashed you, my dear, I did. But He Who created the creeping things upon the earth has preserved you from the boot of man." The swede he dusted and crammed in his pocket. It was known throughout the hamlets—the "Streets" and "Greens"—of Dallington Parish that the minister was as poor as he was unblushing about his poverty.

The evening was very still. Eddies and swells of golden, watery light drifted over the hills round Dallington. In the north the sharp, wooded hill where Brightling stood was like a golden cone, and the kiln-shaped obelisk by Lobden's House which marked the highest point of South-east Sussex was also burnished to rare metal. The scent of water, stagnant on fallen leaves, crept from the little woods where the primroses and windflowers smothered old stumps in their pale froth, or spattered with milky stars the young moss of the year. At Woods Corner the smoke of a turf fire was rising from the inn, and there was a smell of beer, too, as the minister passed the door, and turned down the East Road towards Slivericks. The fire and the beer both tempted him, for there was neither at the Horse-lunges, the tumble-down old cottage where he lodged in Sunday Street. But the former he looked on as an unmanly weakness, the latter as a snare of the devil, so he swung on, humming a metrical psalm.

About a hundred yards below Woods Corner, just where the road, washed stony by the rains, runs under the webbing of Slivericks oaks, he turned into a field, across which a footpath led a pale stripe towards Sunday Street. From the top of the field he could look down over the whole sweep of country within the Four Roads, to the marshes and the sea, or rather the saffron and purple mists where the marshes and the sea lay together in enchantment. The yellow light wavered up to him

from the sunset, over the woods of Forges and Harebeating ; there was a sob of wind from Stillands Tower, and a gleam of half-hidden ponds in the spinneys by Puddledock. Mr. Sumption stood still and listened.

The air was full of sunset sounds—the lowing of cows came up with a mingled cuckoo's cry, there was a tinkle of water behind him in the ditch, and the soft swish of wind in the trees and in the hedge, nodding ashes and salallows and oaks to and fro against the light-filled sky. On the wind was a mutter and pulse, a throb which seemed to be in it yet not of it, like the beating of a great heart, strangely remote from all the gleam and softness of spring sunset, pale fluttering cuckoo-flowers, and leaf-sweet pools of rain. A blackbird called from the copse by Cowlease Farm, and his song was as the voice of sunset and April and pooled rain . . . still the great distant heart throbbed on, its dim beats pulsing on the wind, aching on the sunset, over the fields of peaceful England dropping asleep in April.

The Reverend Mr. Sumption cracked his fingers loudly once or twice :

“ You hear 'em pretty plain to-night . . . the guns in France.”

2

He walked slowly on towards the stile, then stopped again and pulled a letter out of his pocket. It was a dirty letter, written on cheap note-paper with a smudged indelible pencil.

“ Dear Father,” it ran, “ I reckon you'll be wild when you get this. I have left the Fackory and have enlisted in the R. Sussex Regiment. I could not stand that dirty tyke of Hubbard our forman any more. So I've gone, for I'm sick of this, and there's no fear of my being fetched back, as I'm not satisfackory nor skilled in particular, and should have been fetched out anyhow all

in good time, I reckon. So don't go taking on about this, but please send me some fags, and I should like some chockolate, and get some of those kokernut buns at the shop with the crinkly paper round. It is a week since I did it, but I have been to the Y.M.C.A., and bought some Cherry-blossom boot-pollish and a packet of Players, and have no more money, and they said on a board, 'Write home to-night.' Well, dear Father, I hope you will not take this too badly. Some good may come of it, for I am a soldier now and going to fight the Germans. Good-bye and don't forget to send the things I said.

"Your loving son,

"JERRY.

"(467572 Pvte. Sumption, 9th Co. 18th Bn. R. Suss. Regiment.)"

The minister crushed the letter back into the pocket already bulging with the swede. "O Lord," he groaned, "why doth it please Thee to afflict Thy servant again? I reckon I've stood a lot on account of that boy, and there seems no end to it. He's the prodigal son that never comes home, he's the lost sheep that never gets into the fold, and yet he's my child and the woman from Ithornden's . . ." His mutterings died down, for he heard footsteps behind him.

A young man was crossing the field from Slivericks, a sturdy, stocky fellow, about five-and-a-half feet high, with leggings and corduroy riding-breeches, and a black coat which was a little too small for him and as he drew near sent out an odour of moth-killer—evidently some young farmer, unaccountably Sundified on a week-day evening.

"Hullo, Tom," said the minister.

"Hullo, Mus' Sumption."

The boy stood aside for the older man to cross the stile. His head hung a little over the unaccustomed

stiffness of his collar, and his eyes seemed full of rather painful thought. Mr. Sumption fumbled in his pockets, drew out the letter, the swede, a pencil without a point, a Testament, a squashed mass of chickweed, a tract, and finally a broken-backed cigarette, which he handed to Tom.

"Bad news, I reckon?"

Tom nodded.

"They woan't let me off. I wur afeard they wouldn't. You see, there's faather and the boys left, and I couldn't explain as how faather had bad habits. You can't bite back lik that on your own kin."

"No, you can't," and Mr. Sumption carefully smoothed a dirty scrap of paper as he put it back in his pocket. "By the way, my boy's just joined up. I heard from him this morning. He's in the Eighteenth Sussex—I shouldn't wonder if you found yourselves together."

"Lord, Mus' Sumption! You doan't tell me as he's left the factory?"

"Reckon he has. Thought he'd like to fight for his King and country. He was always a plucked 'un, and he couldn't bear to see the lads going to the front without him."

There was a gleam in the minister's eyes, and he cracked his fingers loudly.

"I'm proud of him—I'm proud of my boy. He's done a fine thing, for of course he need never have gone. He's been three years in munitions now, and him only twenty. He went up to Erith when he was a mere lad, no call for him to go, and now he's joined up as a soldier when there was no call for him to go, neither."

Tom looked impressed.

"Maybe I ought to be feeling lik he does, but truth to tell it maakes me heavy-hearted to be leaving the farm just now."

"The Lord will provide."

‘I’m none so sure o’ that, wud faather and his habits, and the boys so young and wild, and the girls wud their hearts in other things, and mother, poor soul, so unsensible.’

“Well, what does the farm matter? Beware lest it become Naboth’s vineyard unto you. Is this a time to buy cattle and vineyards and olive-yards? This is the day which the Prophet said should burn like an oven, and the proud, even the wicked, be as stubble. What’s your wretched farm? Think of the farms round Ypers and Dixmood, think of the farms round Rheims and Arrass—Stop!” and he seized Tom’s arm in his hard, restless fingers—“Listen to those guns over in France. Perhaps every thud you hear means the end of a little farm.”

Tom stood dejectedly beside him, the broken-backed cigarette, for which the minister had unfortunately been unable to provide a light, hanging drearily from his teeth. The soft mutter and thud pulsed on. The sun was slowly foundering behind the woods of Bird-in-Eye, sending up great shafts and spines of flowery light into the sky which was now green as a meadow after rain.

“This war queers me,” he said, and his voice, low and thick as it was, like any Sussex countryman’s, yet was enough to drown the beating of that alien heart. “I doan’t understand it. I can’t git the hang of it nohow.”

“A lot of it queers me,” said Mr. Sumption, “and I reckon that in many ways we’re all as godless as the Hun. It’s not only the Germans that shall burn like stubble—it’s us. The oven’s prepared for us as well as for them.”

They were walking together down steep fields, the ground dreamy with grey light, while before them, beyond the sea, burned the great oven of the sunset, full of horns of flame.

“I’m thinking of the farm,” continued Tom, his mind sticking to its first idea. “I’m willing enough to go and

fight for the farms in France and Belgium, but seems to me a Sussex farm's worth two furrin' ones. Worge aun't a fine place, but it's done well since I wur old enough to help faather—help him wud my head as well as my arms, I mean. Faather's an unaccountable clever chap—you should just about hear him talk at the pub, and the books he's read you'd never believe. But he's got ways wot aun't good for farming, and he needs somebody there to see as things doan't slide when he can't look after them himself."

"Can't your brother Harry do anything? He must be nearly sixteen."

"Harry's unaccountable wild-like. He's more lik to git us into trouble than help us at all."

"Maybe your father will pull-to a bit when you're gone and he sees things depend on him."

"Maybe he will, and maybe he woan't. But you doan't understand, Mus' Sumption. You doan't know wot it feels like to be took away from your work to help along a war as you didn't ask for and don't see the hang of. Maybe you'd think different of the war if you had to fight in it, but being a minister of religion you aun't ever likely to have to join up. I'm ready to go and do my share in putting chaps into the oven, as you say, but it's no use or sense your telling me as it doan't matter about the farm, for matter it does, and I'm unaccountable vrothered wud it all."

He grunted, and spat out the fag. Mr. Sumption, taking offence at once, waved his arms like a black windmill.

"Ho! I don't understand, don't I? with my only son just gone for a soldier. D'you think you care for your dirty farm more than I care for my Jerry? D'you think I wouldn't rather a hundred times go myself than that he should go? O Lord, that this boy should mock me! You'll be safe enough, young Tom. You've only the Germans to fear, but my lad has to fear his own

countrymen too. The army was not made for gipsy-women's sons. My poor Jerry! . . . there in the ranks like a colt in harness. He'll be sorry he's done it to-morrow, and then they'll kill him. . . . Oh, hold your tongue, Tom Beatup! Here we are in Sunday Street."

3

Sunday Street was the lane that linked up Pont's Green on the East Road with Bucksteep Manor at Four Throws. From the southern distance it looked like the street of a town, oddly flung across the hill—a streak of red houses, with the squat steeples of oasts, an illusion of shops and spires, crumbling on near approach into a few tumble-down cottages and the oasts of Egypt Farm. From the north you saw the chimneys first, high above the roofs like rabbits' ears above their heads; then you tumbled suddenly upon the hamlet: the Bethel, the Horselunges, the shop, the inn whose sign was the Rifle Volunteer, the forge, the pond, the two farms—Worge and Egypt—with their cottages, and the farmstead of Little Worge sidling away towards Pont's Green.

To-night it was fogged in the grey smoke of its own wood fires, with here and there on its windows the lemon green of the sky. It smelled faintly of wood-smoke, sweet mud and standing rain, of rot in lathes and tiles. The Horselunges, the cottage where the minister lodged, was the first house in the village after the forge. It stood opposite the Bethel, a brick, eighteenth-century building with big gaunt windows staring blindly over the fields to Puddledock. The Bethel had been built in Georgian days when the Particular Baptists flourished in greater numbers round Sunday Street, and a saint of theirs had built it to "the glory of God and in memory of my dear wife Susannah Odlarne,

saved by Grace. For Many are called but Few are chosen."

Mr. Sumption and Tom had walked the last of their way in silence. But the minister's anger had fizzled out as quickly as it had kindled, and at the door of the forge he held out his hand very kindly to the boy.

"Well, good-night to you, lad. I must look in and see Bournier here for a minute or two. I hope your mother won't be much distressed at your news."

"Reckon she will, but it can't be helped. . . . Funny, you doan't hear the guns down here."

"No more you do, but they're going it just the same—knocking away little farms."

Tom nodded with a wry smile and walked off. The minister turned into the forge.

Mr. Sumption could never pass the forge, and the glow and roar of sparks from its chimney would call him over many a field, from Galleybird or Harebeating, or even from the doors of sick people—if they were not very sick. He was a blacksmith's son.

His father had worked the smithy at the cross-roads by Bethersden in Kent, and Ezra Sumption had grown up in the smell of hoof-parings and the ring of smitten iron. His sketchy education finished, he had taken his place beside his father at the anvil—he had held the meek tasselled hoofs of the farm-horses, he had worked the great bellows that sent the flames roaring up the chimney like Judgment Day, he had swung the heavy smith's hammer with an arm that in a few years grew lustier than his dad's, and in time had come to cast as good iron and clap it on as surely as any smith in Kent.

But during his adolescence strange things had grown with his bulk and girth. Lonely and Bible-bred, he came to work strange dreams into the roaring furnace and clanging iron. In those sheeting, belching flames he came to see the presage of that day which should

burn like an oven, the burning fiery furnace of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, through which only those could walk unsinged who had with them the Son of God. When he swung the hammer above his head he swung God's judgment down on the molten iron, shaping out of its fiery torment a form of use. When the horse clumped out of the smithy with the new iron on his hoofs, he felt that there went a soul saved, a child of God passed through fire into service.

He became "queer." He spoke his thoughts, and in time preached them to the men who brought their horses to be shod. His father jeered at him, his mother was afraid, but the minister of a neighbouring chapel took him up. He thought he had found a rustic saint. He invited young Sumption to his house, taught him, and encouraged him to enter the ministry. The parents were flattered by the pastor's notice, and he found little difficulty in persuading them to let their boy leave the forge and train as a minister of the Particular Baptists.

Rather bewildered and scared at the new life before him, young Ezra Sumption, comely, burly, shock-headed, brown-skinned as a mushroom in a wet field, passed into a training college of the sect, and emerged a full-blown pastor, with black clothes on his unwieldy limbs and a tongue for ever struggling with the niceties of English speech. He was a great disappointment to his benefactor, for the smith in him had triumphantly survived all genteel training and theological examinations; he was to all intents the same boy who had heard voices in the fire and had preached to the carters. His manners and conversation had slightly improved, and his imaginings had been given a dose of dogma, but his rough uncouthness, his "queerness" remained as before. He was an utter failure as assistant pastor in a chapel at Dover—the congregation was shocked by the violence and vulgarity of his forge-born similes, his Judgment Day appeals, all the spate and fume of the

old Doomsday doctrines which were fast dying out of Nonconformity. He pined for the country, and seemed unable to conform to town habits. On his holidays he went back to the forge and helped his father with the shoeing as if he had never worn a black coat. It was on one of these holidays that he finally damned himself.

In a cottage at Ithornden where he had gone to visit a sick woman he met a gipsy girl of the Rossarmescroes or Hearn's. Her people had given up their wandering life, and settled down in the neighbourhood, where they owned several cottages. Nevertheless, to marry her, as Sumption did soon after their third meeting, was his pastoral suicide. He took her with him to Dover, where they were both miserable for a few months. Then he had to give up his post. They returned to the forge at Bethersden, where Sumption would have liked to become a blacksmith again, if it had not been for the continual restless yearning of the Word within him, that drop of the divine which had somehow mixed with his clay, and made him drunken.

At the close of the year Meridian Sumption died at the birth of her child. They had been ideally happy in their short married life, in spite of the cage-bars of circumstances and the drivings of the Word which divided them as in the beginning it had divided the waters from the earth. After her death he became "queerer" than ever. He roamed from village to village, preaching to farmers, gipsies, labourers, tinkers, all who would hear him and some who would not—leaving his child in his mother's care.

Six years later the death of his father and mother made it necessary that he should take the boy—named grotesquely Jeremiah Meridian, as if to show his double origin in religion and vagabondage. At the same time his first patron, the minister of Bethersden, offered to recommend him for the pastorate of the Particular Baptist Chapel at Sunday Street near Dallington. His con-

science had long grieved over the vagaries of his blacksmith saint, and in this empty pastorate he saw a way of settling both. Sumption had acquired a certain fame as a preacher among the 'dens of Kent, candidates for the Particular Ministry were not so many as they used to be, and the pastorate of Sunday Street, with its dwindling, bumpkin congregation, country loneliness, and small revenues, was hard to fill. After various difficulties, the new minister arrived with his black-eyed, swarthy child. He had grown tired of his wanderings, and had conceived an erratic, arbitrary affection for this pledge of gipsy love. He looked forward to a settled country life and to preaching the Word in his own Bethel.

The villagers, for the most part, liked him. His manners offended them, and as they were mostly Church-people they seldom came to his chapel except on wet Sundays, when it meant too much dirt and trouble to go to hear old Mr. Foxe at Dallington or young Mr. Poulett-Smith at Brownbread Street. But from the first he was as one of themselves, treated with no respect and much kindness. He was seldom invited to sick-beds or to officiate at funerals or marriages, but he never lacked an invitation to a Harvest Supper or Farmers' Club Dinner. For his sake the neighbourhood tolerated the villainies of his Jerry, a throw-back to the poaching, roving, thieving Rossarmescroes. None the less, they were glad when at the outbreak of war he went to work in a munition factory, first in London, then, through a series of not very creditable wanderings, to Erith. Only the minister grieved, for he loved Jerry as he had loved no human thing since his mother died in the little apple-smelling room above the smithy. He was not always kind to the boy, and the arm which had wielded the hammer so lustily had on one or two shocking occasions nearly broken the bones he loved. But he had for his son a half-spiritual, half-animal affection, and the

villagers pitied him when the boy went, though they were glad to see him go.

“Mus’ Sumption wur more blacksmith nor he wur minister,” they said when any local enthusiasm for him prevailed; and it was true that in his loneliness and anxiety he would often find comfort in the forge at Sunday Street, where he could sit and watch Bournier the smith swing his hammer, or even sometimes himself, with coat thrown off and shirt-sleeves rolled back over arms long and hairy as a gorilla’s, smite the hot iron or scrape the patient hoof, while his face grew red as copper in the firelight and the sweat ran over it and his shaggy chest.

To-night, when Jerry had wounded him afresh, he turned to his unfailing refuge. His pain was not the mere dread of death or maiming of the lad—it was something more sinister, more intangible. “The army is not for the gipsy woman’s son.” He feared for Jerry in that organised system of rank and order and command. He would have preferred him in the workshop even if the relative danger of the two places had been reversed. Jerry was less likely to be smashed by a German shell than by the system in which he had enrolled himself. He would break his head against its discipline, hang himself in its rules. . . . His dread for Jerry under martial law was the dread his Meridian’s ancestors would have felt for her under a roof. It was a fear based more on instinct than on reason, therefore all the more bruising to the instinctive passion of fatherhood. It was well that he had this refuge of iron and anvil, of hammer and hoof, this small comforting similitude of the day which should burn as an oven. . . . Bournier the smith did not talk to him much. He made a few technical remarks, and winked at his mate when Mr. Sumption boasted of Jerry’s valour in joining the army. But gradually the tired, careworn look on the minister’s face died away, his eyes ceased to smoulder and roll; in the thick stuffy

atmosphere, strong with the smell of hoofs and the ammoniacal smells of hide and horses, grey with smoke and noisy with the roar of flames and the ring of iron, he was going back in peace to his father's house, to the smithy at the throws by Bethersden, before the burdens of divine and human love had come down upon him.

4

After his companion had left him, Tom Beatup walked quickly down the lane, past the Horselunges and the Rifle Volunteer, to where Worge gate hung crooked across Worge drive, paintless and smeared with dew. Here he stopped a minute, and looked at the huddle of the farm. It was one black shape against the yellow of the sky, and the cones of its oasts and the spires of its poplars seemed part of its block, so that it looked grotesque and horned. He hesitated, rubbed his hand along the top of the gate and licked the dew off his fingers, then turned and walked eastward.

Beyond Egypt Farm and the cottages of Worge, just before the willow pond that marked the end of the street, stood the shop, where Thyrza Honey was "licensed to sell tobacco." It was in darkness now, except for a faint creep of light under the door. Had Thyrza "shut up"? No—the handle turned, the little bell gave its buzzing ring, and the warm light ran out for a moment into the darkling lane—with a smell of tea and tobacco, sweets and sawdust, scrubbed floor and rotting beams, the smell that was to Tom the same refuge as the smell of the forge was to Mr. Sumption.

The shop was empty, but he could see a shadow moving to and fro across the little window at the back—a ridiculous little window, about a foot square, yet as gay with its lace curtains and pink ribbons as the drawing-room bow of a Brighton lodging-house. The next

minute a face was pressed against it, then withdrawn, and the door at the back of the shop opened.

"Good evenun, Mus' Tom."

"Good evenun, Mrs. Honey."

She moved slowly to her place behind the counter. All her movements were slow, which women sometimes found irritating, but never men, who were always either consciously or unconsciously aware of a kind of drawling beauty in her gait. She was fair, with hair like fluffy, sun-bleached grass. Her skin was like that of an apricot, soft and thick, of a deep creamy yellow, with soft dabs of colour on her wide cheek-bones.

"A packet of woodbines, please," said Tom.

She reached them from the shelf behind her.

"Have you got any bull's-eyes?"

"Yes—three-ha'pence an ounce."

"They've got dearer."

"And they'll get dearer still, I reckon."

"Give me three penn'orth, please."

She took them out of a glass bottle at her elbow.

"Got any monster telephones?"

"I dunno—I'm afeard we're sold out."

Thyrza always spoke of herself in a business capacity as "we."

"Could you maake up two penn'orth? Harry and Zacky are unaccountable fond of them."

"You're a kind brother—buying sweeties for all the family. I reckon the bull's-eyes are fur your sisters."

"Reckon they are. No use giving monster telephones to girls—they can't be eaten dential."

This was obvious when Thyrza finally unearthed the telephones in an old case under the ginger-beer box. They were long, black coiling strings of liquorice, requiring sleight of hand, combined with a certain amount of unfastidiousness, for their consumption. Tom was disappointed that Thyrza had found them so soon. He

stood by the counter, fingering his purchases and wishing his money was not all gone.

"I hear you've bin up at the Tribunal," said Thyrsa, coming to the rescue.

"Yes—they woan't let me off."

"You're sorry, I reckon."

"Unaccountable. I doan't know wot ull become of the farm."

Thyrsa sighed sympathetically, having nothing to say in the way of comfort.

"They said as how I wurn't really indispensable, faather being able-bodied and having two lads besides me, and two 'hands'—he laughed bitterly. "I'd like to show 'em the 'hands'—two scarecrows, you might say."

"It's a sad world," remarked Thyrsa comfortably.

Mrs. Honey was a widow, but never had more than a sentimental sigh for her husband who had made her miserable, and then suddenly rather proud—on that last day of October when the Royal Sussex had held the road to Sussex against the fury of the Prussian Guard, and Sam Honey died to save the home he had made so unhappy while he lived. He had died bravely and she was proud of him, but he had lived meanly and she could not regret him.

"Wot sort of a soldier d'you think I'll make, Mrs. Honey?"

"A good one, sureye"—and she showed him teeth like curd.

"I'm naun so sure, though. I'm a farmer bred, and the life ull be middling straange to me."

"Maybe you'll lik it. Sam liked it fine. There was no end o' fun to be had, he said, and foakes all giving you chocolate and woodbines, just as if you wur the king."

"Will you send me a postcard now and agaun, Mrs. Honey?"

"Reckon I will."

There was silence for a minute or two in the shop. The

oil lamp swung, moving the shadows over the ceiling where the beams sagged with the weight of Thyrza's little bedroom. A clock in the back room ticked loudly. Tom was still leaning across the counter, looking at Thyrza. They both felt rather awkward, as they often felt in each other's company. Thyrza wondered when Tom was going. She liked him—liked him unaccountable—but her bit of supper was on the fire in the next room, there was some mending to be done, and many other odds and ends of feminine business before it was time to set the mouse-traps, put the milk-jug on the doorstep, and go to bed. Besides, she knew he ought to be going back to Worge to tell his family the news which should have been theirs before he brought it to her.

"I reckon your mother ull be wondering how you've fared this afternoon. Has your father gone home and told her?"

"I left faather at Woods Corner."

"She'll be worriting about him too, then."

"Maybe I should ought to go home and tell them."

He straightened himself with a sigh. He must leave his refuge of tea and soap and candles, the peace of Thyrza Honey's slow movements and thick, sweet voice. She was sorry for him.

"You'll look in again, Mus' Tom?"

"Surelye."

"Maybe you'll bring your sister Ivy round for a cup of tea before you go. Ull you be going soon?"

"In a fortnight. . . . Good evenun, Mrs. Honey."

"Good evenun, Mus' Tom."

Again the bell gave its buzzing ring, as he opened the door and went out.

Tom's heart had sunk rather low before he came to Worge. He was always dissatisfied with himself after

seeing Thyrsa. He never seemed able to find anything to say, just because she was the person he liked most in the world to talk to. He felt that he must be very different from the other men who came to see her—for men liked Thyrsa—who could make even the buying of a penn'orth of sweets an occasion for artful sally and interesting conversation. That reminded him that he had left all his purchases on the counter. What an unaccountable fool he was! However, he would not go back for them. They must wait till to-morrow. Still, he wished he hadn't left them. Thyrsa would think him silly, and besides he had wanted to give those sweets to his brothers and sisters. He nearly always brought them something when he went into the town.

They were all at supper in the kitchen—he could hear their voices. He wondered if his father had come back yet. He had not, for the first question that greeted his entrance was :

“ Whur's your faather, Tom ? ”

“ I left him at Woods Corner. I'd have thought he'd bin home by now.”

“ Then you thought silly. 'T'aun't likely as he'll come home till they close. You should have stopped along of un.”

“ I thought I'd better git back home and tell you the news.”

“ And wot's that ? Have they let you off ? ”

“ Not they. A fortnight's final.”

Mrs. Beatup began to cry. She was a large, stout woman with masses of rough grey hair, and a broad, rather childish face, which now looked more like a child's than ever as it wrinkled up for crying.

“ Now, mother, doan't you taake on,” said Ivy, the eldest girl, getting up and putting her arm round her.

“ It's a shaame, a hemmed shaame,” sobbed the woman. “ No woander as faather's stopped at Woods

Corner. To take our eldest boy as is the prop and stay of the whole of us ! ”

“ He aun’t no such thing,” said Ivy, who was a strapping girl—rather like her mother, except that her round face ended in a sharp chin, which gave her an unexpected air of shrewdness. The second girl, Nell, was helping her brother to his supper of pork and cabbage.

“ No one can say he’s indispensable,” she remarked in rather a pretty, half-educated voice—she was pupil teacher in her second year at the school in Brownbread Street. “ There’s Harry just on sixteen, and there’s Juglery and Elphick, and no one can say father isn’t a strong man and able to look after the farm.”

“ Your faather’s no use. Tom, did you tell them as your faather had bad habits ? ”

“ No, I didn’t,” said Tom sulkily, shovelling in the cabbage with his knife.

“ Then you wur a fool. You know as your faather aun’t himself three nights out of five, and yet you go and say naun about it. How are they to know if you doan’t tell them ? ”

“ I wurn’t going to tell all the big folk round Senlac as my faather drinks.”

“ Hush, Tom ! I never said as you wur to say that—but you might have let ’em know, careful like, as he aun’t always able to look after the farm as well as you might think.”

“ It ud have done no good. Drunkenness aun’t a reason for exemption, as they say. Besides, I’d middling little to do in the matter. Faather was applying fur me, and he did all the talking—an unaccountable lot of it, too. I wurn’t took because there wurn’t enough said against it, I promise you. But seemingly before a farm chap like me gits off, he’s got to have a certifikit from the War Agricultural Committee, and they read a letter saying as they’d recommended one to be given, but the Executive Committee or summat hadn’t fallen in wud

it. So there's no use crying, mother, for go I must, and it'll be none the easier for you making all this vrother."

He was cross because he was unhappy.

"Will you be in the Royal Sussex, Tom—along of Mus' Dixon and Mus' Archie?" asked Zacky, the youngest boy.

"I dunno."

"When ull you be leaving?"

"In a fortnight, I've told you."

"I hear as how Bill Putland ull be going soon," said Mrs. Beatup. "He'd be company like fur you, Tom."

"Bill!—he's too unaccountable fine and grand fur me. He thinks no end of himself being Mus' Lamb's chuvver. But I'll tell you who's joined the Sussex, though, and that's Jerry Sumption. I met Mus' Sumption, this evenun, and he toald me."

"You doan't mean to say as Jerry's left the fackory?"

"Yes. He went and enlisted—minister says he's unaccountable proud of him."

There was a crackle of laughter round the table.

"Well, we all of us know, and I reckon minister knows as we know, that if Jerry had bin any sort of use at the munititions they wouldn't have let him join up. It's a law that if you maake munititions you doan't have to join up."

"Oh, Jerry's bin never no good at naun. He's jest a roving gipsy dog."

Mrs. Beatup turned suddenly to Ivy:

"Did you know aught of this?"

"Not I!" said Ivy carelessly. "Jerry hasn't written to me fur more'n a month. Maybe this is why."

"I'm justabout sorry fur Mus' Sumption," said Tom, whom his supper had put in a better humour. "He has a feeling as Jerry ull come to no good in the army."

"No more he will, nor nowhere, I'm thinking," said Mrs. Beatup. "Doan't you never have naun to do wud him, Tom. I doan't want my children to git the splash

of that gipsy muck——” And she threw another half-defiant, half-furtive look at Ivy.

“Where’s Harry?” asked Tom.

“Out ratting,” Zacky informed him.

“Well, he woan’t find any supper’s bin kept fur him, that’s all,” said Mrs. Beatup, rising and pushing back her chair. “Nell, put the plaates on the tray and maake yourself useful fur wunst.”

A flush crept over Nell’s pale, pretty face, from her neck to the roots of her reddish hair. She gingerly picked up two of the smelly, greasy plates, then quickly put them down again.

“There’s faather.”

“Where?” Mrs. Beatup listened.

“I heard the gate—and there goes the side door.”

The next minute a heavy, uncertain footstep was heard in the passage, then a bump as if someone had lurched into the wall. The family stood stock-still and waited.

“Maybe he’ll hurt himself in the dark,” said Mrs. Beatup, “now policeman woan’t let us have the light at the passage bend.”

“No, he’s all right. There he is scrabbling at the door.”

There was the sound of fingers groping and scratching. Then the door opened and the farmer of Worge came in, his hat a little on one side, a lock of hair falling over his red forehead, and the whole of his waistcoat undone. He stood, supporting himself against the doorpost, and glared at the family.

“Your supper’s still hot, Ned,” said Mrs. Beatup hesitatingly—“leastways, the gals have eaten all the taters, but I can hot you up. . . .” She began to whimper as the bleared grey eyes slowly rolled towards her.

“Be quiet, Mother,” said Ivy.

Mus’ Beatup, slowly and carefully, made his way towards a broken-sprung arm-chair beside the fire.

He then sat down by the simple process of falling into it backwards ; then he stretched out a foot that seemed made of clay and manure—

“ Taake off my boots, Missus.”

6

It was quite dark before Tom was able to slip out to see to one or two odd jobs that wanted doing in the barns. He felt himself obliged to stay in the kitchen while his father was there, for though there had not been more than a few occasions when surliness had blazed into assault, he knew that it was always just possible that his father might become violent, especially as his mother always went the worst way—with tears, reproaches, arguments and lamentations. What would happen when he was no longer at hand to watch over her he did not like to think. It was all part of the load of anxiety and love which was settling down on him.

If he had been a free man he would probably have felt quite ready for the change ahead of him. Though his imagination had scarcely taken hold of the war, and though the harrow and the plough, with the thick sucking earth on his boots, and the drip of rain or stew of sunshine on waiting fields, had absorbed most of the boyish spirit of adventure which might have sent him questing out of stuffier circumstances—though his was the country heart, which is the last heart for warfare—in spite of all, he might have gone gaily to the new life, with its wider reach and freedom, if he had not known that his departure meant the crumbling of that little corner of England which was his, which his arm had built and his back supported.

He knew that Worge leaned on him, for he felt the weight of it even in his dreams. It was four years now since he had put his shoulder against it ; he was only

just twenty, but he knew that if four years ago he had not made up his mind to save the farm, his father would have drunk, and the rest of the family muddled, the place into the auction market, and the Beatups would now be scattered into towns or soaking their humble-pie in beer on smallholdings. He had done nothing very wonderful. The place was small and no more wanted a giant to hold it up than a giant to knock it down. He had merely worked while others slacked, thought while others slept, remembered while others forgot. But, without any thrill of pride or adventure, he knew that he had tided Worge through its bad hour, and that the same little upheld it now. He was the real farmer, though he had to be careful not to let his headship be seen. His father had not explained things clearly to the tribunal—explaining things clearly was not a quality of Tom's either—he had been far too anxious to preserve his own importance, which might have suffered had he said, "My son runs the farm while I'm drinking at the pub."

The others were not even as much good as his father. In the intervals of drinking, which in spite of Mrs. Beatup's three-in-five calculation were often quite respectable, he was both hard-working and resourceful, though of late his brain had grown spongier and threatened a final rot. But the rest of the family had no upstanding moments. Ivy was strong and comparatively willing, but Tom did not believe in girls as farm-hands and never thought of Ivy even milking the cows. She and her mother looked after the chickens and did the housework, that was all. Nell was out all day and busy working in the evenings for her examination; Zacky was still at school, and Harry was a rover—the comrade of other farmers' younger sons in ratting and sparrow-hunting, in visiting fairs, in trespassing for birds' eggs, or sometimes solitary in strange obedience to the call of distant wood or village green. Yet Harry was Tom's one hope—a last, forlorn one.

Tom was waiting for him now. He wanted to speak to his young brother alone, not in the dim lath-smelling bedroom where Zacky would be a third. Harry did not generally stop out late, though he had occasionally roamed all night—hunger and fear of a beating (another of Tom's quasi-paternal tasks) usually brought him home just in time to satisfy one and escape the other.

Tom looked into the cowshed—one of the cows had shown ailing signs that day, but she seemed well enough now, with her large head lolling against the stall, her eyes soft and untroubled in the brown glow of his lantern. He would not see the calf which had caused him so much half-proud anxiety; he wondered what would become of them both if it should be born on one of Father's "bad nights." Then he went into the stable, where the three farm-horses—the sorrel, the brown, and the bay—stood stamping and chumbling, with the cold miasmic air like a mist above the straw. Then he went back into the yard—saw that the henhouse door was fast, that old Nimrod the watch-dog had his bone and his water and a good length of chain. It was very cold, there was a faint smell of rime on the motionless air, and the stars were like spluttering candles in the frost-black sky. These April days and nights were unaccountable tricky, he told himself. That noon the very heart of the manure-heap had melted in the sun, and now it was hardening again—his boot hardly sank into the stuff as he trod it with his heel. Some of it ought to be carted to-morrow and put round the apple-trees. . . .

Harry was very late. He would go into the corn-chamber and do some accounts. He was clumsy with his figures, and they kept him there twisting and scratching his head till nearly ten o'clock, when he heard a footfall, would-be stealthy, on the stones.

He rose quickly and ran round the yard to the back-door just as a shadow melted up against it.

"Here—you!" cried Tom surlily, for he was tired and

muddled with his sums—"doan't you think to go slithering in quiet lik that, you good-fur-naun."

"I'll come in when I like," grumbled Harry. "You aun't maaster here."

"Well, I'm the bigger chap, anyways, so mind your manners. Where've you bin?"

"Only down to Puddledock."

"Puddledock aun't sich a valiant plaace as you shud spend half a day there. You've bin up to no good, I reckon. A fine chap you'll be to mind Worge when I'm gone."

"You're going, then?"

Harry's voice was anxious, for he was fond of Tom, though he resented his interference with his liberties.

"Yes—I'm going . . . join up in a fortnight. Come in, Harry; I want to spik to you."

"I want my supper."

"You'll have your supper, though you doan't deserve it, you spannelling beggar. I'll come and sit along of you; we must talk business, you and I."

"About Worge?"

"Yes."

They were in the kitchen now, dark except for some gleeds of fire. The rest of the family had gone to bed, but the broken supper was still on the table—the hacked, hardening loaf, and the remains of the bacon and cabbage under floating scabs of grease. Tom lit the lamp and Harry sat down, hungry and uncritical. The two boys were curiously alike, short and sturdy, with broad sunburnt faces, grey eyes, big mouths, and small, defiant noses. Harry's coat was covered with clay all down one side, and the sleeve was torn—Tom was too heavy-hearted for more scolding, just noted drearily a new item of expenditure. The younger brother saw the elder's cast-down looks:

"I'm unaccountable sorry, Tom," he said sheepishly.

“Cos of wot? Cos I’m going or cos you aun’t worth your bed and keep?”

“Cos of both.”

“Well, there’s naun to do about one, but a sight to do about t’other. Harry, you’ll have to mind Worge when I’m agone.”

“Wot can I do?”

“You can work instead of roaming, and you can see to things when faather’s bad—see as there aun’t naun foolish done or jobs disremembered. Elphick and Juglery have only half a head between them. Before I go I’ll tell you all I’ve had in my head about the hay in Bucksteep field, and the oats agaunst the Street and them fuggles down by the Sunk. And you’ll have to kip it all in your head saum as I’ve kipped it in mine, and see as things come out straight by harvest. D’you understand?”

“Yes, Tom.”

“And there’s Maudie’s calf due next month, and a brood of them Orpingtons, and I’d meant to buy a boar at Lewes Fair and kip him for service. You’ll never have the sense to do it. You mun stop your ratting and your roving, or Worge ull be at the auctioneer’s. Faather’s a valiant clever chap when he’s sober, and book-larned too, but the men are two old turnup-heads, and Zacky’s scarce more’n a child, and the gals are gals—so it’s up to you, Harry, as they say, to kip the plaace going.”

Harry groaned—

“Why wudn’t they let you stay?”

“Because they didn’t see no sense in kipping an A man on farm-work when there wur plenty about to do his job. They doan’t understand how things are, and when you coame to think of it, it’s a shaum as I can’t go wud a free heart.”

“Do you want to go?”

“I dunno. I aun’t got the chance of knowing, wud

all this vrothering me. But I'd go easier if I cud think the plaace wouldn't fall to pieces as soon as I left it, and that if I'm killed . . ."

He stopped. Strangely enough, he had never thought of being killed till now.

7

Tom's calling-up papers did not arrive till a few days later. It was a showery morning, with a flooding blue sky, smeethed and streaked with low floats of cloud. The rain was cracking on the little green panes of the kitchen window, and the spatter of the drops, with the soft humming song of the kitchen fire, was in Tom's ears as he studied the sheet which entitled one horse, one bicycle, one mule, one (asterisked) private soldier to travel cost-free to Lewes. He opened his mouth to say, "My calling-up papers have come," but said nothing, just sat with his mouth open. The shower rattled and the fire hummed, then a sudden spill of sunshine came from the dripping edge of a cloud into the room, making the drops on the pane like golden beads, and lighting up the breakfast table, so that the mangled loaf and the dirty cups became almost as wonderful as the shining faces round them.

Mus' Beatup was himself this morning—they still called it "himself," though of late his real self had seemed more and more removed from the lusty headacheless man who sat among them to-day, more and more closely coiled with that abject thing of sickness and violence which came lurching down the fields at dusk from the Rifle Volunteer. He was studying his share of the post—an invitation to an auction at Rushlake Green, where Galleybird Farm was up for sale with all its live and dead stock. Mrs. Beatup had never had a letter in her life, nor apparently wanted one. She always exclaimed at the post, and wondered why Ivy

should have all those postcards. In her young days no one sent postcards to girls. If a chap wanted you for wife he hung around the gate, if he did not want you for wife he took no manner of notice of you. A dozen chaps could not want Ivy for wife—her with as many freckles as a foxglove, and all blowsy too, and sunburnt as a stack—and yet there were nearly a dozen postcards strewn round her plate this morning. Some were field postcards, whizzbangs, from Sussex chaps in France, some were stamped with the red triangle of the Y.M.C.A., some were views of furrin Midland places where Sussex chaps were in training, and some were funny ones that made Ivy throw herself back in her chair, and show her big, white, friendly teeth, and laugh “Ha! ha!” till the others said, “Let’s see, Ivy,” and the picture of the Soldier come home on leave to find twins, or the donkey chewing the Highlander’s kilt, or the Kaiser hiding in a barrel from “*Ach Gott! die Royal Sussex!*” would be passed round the table. To-day one of the pictures of the gentleman with twins—it was a popular one in the Sussex, and Ivy had two this morning—was from Jerry Sumption.

“Says he’s fed up,” said Ivy. “He reckons I knew about his joining. How was I to know? He’s at Waterheel Camp; and he’s met Sid Viner and young Kadwell. They kip those boys far enough from home.”

“And a good thing too,” said Mrs. Beatup. “We doan’t want Minister’s gipsy spannelling round.”

“Spik fur yourself, mother—there aun’t a lad at Waterheel as I wudn’t have here if I cud git him.”

“You’ll come to no good,” grumbled her father, and pretty Nell, with her anæmic flush, shrugged away from her sister’s sprawling elbow. She herself had had only one postcard, which she slipped hastily into the front of her blouse—unlike Ivy, who left hers scattered over the table even when the family had risen from their meal. There was not much in the postcard to justify such

preferential treatment, for it ran—"There will be a meeting of the Sunday-school teachers to-morrow in church at 5.30. H. Poulett-Smith."

Nell began to collect her books for school. She carefully dusted the crumbs from her skirt, smoothed her pretty marigold hair before the bit of mirror by the fireplace, put on her hat and jacket, and was gone. The rest of the family began to disperse. Zacky had to go to school too, but his going was an unwilling, complicated matter compared with Nell's. His mother had to find his cap, his sister to mend his bootlace, his father to cuff his head, and finally his brother Tom to set him marching with a kick in his rear.

Ivy tied on a sacking apron and began to slop soap-suds on the floor of the outer kitchen, Mrs. Beatup set out on a quest—which experience told would last the morning—after a plate of potatoes she could have sworn she had set in the larder overnight. Mus' Beatup went off to his fields with Harry at his tail, and calling to Tom—

"Have you bin over to Egypt about them roots?"

"No—I'm going this mornun."

"Then you can tell Putland as it's taake or leave—he pays my price or he doan't have my wurzels."

"Yes, Father."

Tom went off very quietly, fingering the summons in his pocket. How many times now would he go on these errands to Egypt, Cowlease, Slivericks and other farms? His father would have to go, or if unfit, then Harry would be sent—Harry who would sell you a cart of swedes for tuppence or exchange a prize pig for a ferret. That was an unaccountable queer little bit of paper in his pocket. He could tear it in two, but it could also do the same for him, and in any conflict it must come out winner. It was, as it were, a finger of that invisible hand which was being thrust down through the clouds to grab Tom and other little people. The huge,

unseen, unlimited, unmerciful force of a kingdom's power lay behind it, and Tom's single body and soul must obey without hope of escape the great Manhood that demanded them both, as a potter demands clay and scoops up the helpless earth to bake in his oven. . . .

All this in a more or less rag-and-tag state was passing through his mind as he walked down the drive of Worge, with speedwell a-bloom between the ruts, and came to the Inn whose painted sign was a volunteer of Queen Victoria's day. It was an old house, with a huge windward sprawl of roof, but had not been licensed more than sixty years. Tom disliked it as a temptation which Providence had tactlessly dumped at their door. If Mus' Beatup had had to walk to the Crown at Woods Corner or the George at Brownbread Street he would have been more continuously the smart, upstanding man he was this morning.

Egypt Farm was just across the road. It was smaller than Worge, but also brighter and more prosperous-looking. There was new white paint round the windows and on the cowls of the oasts, and the little patch of garden by the door was trim, with hyacinths a-blowing and early roses spotting the trellis with their first buds.

"Mornun, Tom," called Mrs. Putland cheerily. She was putting a suet pudding into the oven, with the kitchen door wide open, and saw him as he crossed the yard.

"Mornun, ma'am. Is the maaster at home?"

"Maaster's over at Satanstown buying a calf. Can I give him your message?"

"Faather says as it's taake it or leave it about them roots."

"Then I reckon he'll taake it. He never wur the man to higgie-haggle, and the roots is good roots."

"Justabout valiant—I never got a tidier crop out of Podder's field."

Mrs. Putland had come to the door and stood looking

at him, with her arms akimbo. She was a small, trim woman, buttoned and sleeked, and somehow the expression of her face was the same as the expression of the house—the clean, kindly, enquiring look of Egypt with its white-framed staring windows and smooth, ruddy tiles.

“It’ll be unaccountable sad fur your faather to losé you. You’ve bin the prop-stick of Worge this five year.”

“Can’t be helped. I’ve got to go. Had my calling-up paapers this mornun.”

“That’s queer. So did Bill. Reckon you’ll go together.”

“Didn’t Bill try fur exemption, then?”

“No—Mus’ Lamb wouldn’t have it. Besides, there wurn’t no reason as he should stay. We’ve done wud-out him here since he went to the Manor, and Mus’ Lamb ull kip his plaace fur him till he comes back.”

Tom envied Bill his free heart.

“I’ll give him a call,” continued Bill’s mother. “He aun’t due up at the Manor fur an hour yit, and he wur saying only last night as he never sees you now.”

A few minutes later Bill answered his mother’s call, and sauntered round the corner of the house, his hands in his pockets, his chauffeur’s cap a little on one side. He had a handsome, fresh-coloured face, strangely cheeky for a country boy’s, and Tom always felt rather ill at ease in his presence, a little awed by the fact that though his hands might sometimes be brown and greasy with motor-oil, his body was of a well-washed whiteness unknown at Worge.

“Hullo, Bill.”

“Hullo, Tom.”

There had never been a very deep friendship between them; Bill was inclined to be patronising, and Tom both to resent it and to envy him. But to-day a new, mysterious bond was linking them. In the pocket of

Bill's neat livery there was a paper exactly like that in Tom's manure-slopped corduroys.

"I hear you've bin called up, Bill."

"Yes—in a fortnight, they say."

"I'm going too—in a fortnight."

"Pleased?"

"No. I'm unaccountable vrothered at leaving the farm. Wot d'you feel about it?"

"Oh, me?—I'm not sorry. They'll keep my place open for me at the Manor, and I shall like getting a hit at Kayser Bill. Besides, the gals think twice as much of you if you're in uniform."

This was a new complexion on the case, and Tom's thoughts wandered down to the shop.

"I shall like being along of Mus' Archie, too—he told me I could be along of him. We're all eighteenth Sussex hereabouts. I reckon you'll be in with us."

"I dunno."

Tom's brows were crinkled, for he was thinking hard. He was chewing the fact that for a free man there might be something rather pleasant in soldiering. This happy, conceited, self-confident little chauffeur was teaching him that the soldier's lot was not entirely dark. "Called up"—"taken"—"fetched along"—those were the words of his conscript's vocabulary. But now for the first time he saw something beyond them, a voluntary endeavour beyond the conscript's obedience, a corporate enthusiasm beyond his lonely unwillingness. "We're all eighteenth Sussex hereabouts. . . ."

8

April was May before Tom's weeks of grace had run. The field hollows were white with drifts of hawthorn, and the pale purplish haze of the cuckoo-flower had given place to the buttercups' dabble of gold. The papery-

white of the wild cherry had gone from the woods, which were green now, thick, and full of the nutty smell of leaves. The ditches were milky with fennel, and on the high meadows by Thunders Hill the broom and the gorse clumped their yellows together, making the hill a flaming cone to those who saw it from the marshes of Horse Eye.

The farmers of Dallington watched their hayfields rust. There was little corn in that country bounded by the Four Roads, so as the sun climbed higher noon by noon, the neighbourhood grew gipsy-brown—the straw-coloured feathers of the grass veiled a glowing heart of clover, and above them opened the white ox-eyes and pools of sorrel. . . .

Tom Beatup watched ripen the fields whose harvest he would not see. There were some twenty acres of hay at Worge, and two fields in which the green corn was his hope and dread. The crop was promising on the whole—a bit sedge-leaved perhaps, but firm in its seed. There were the hops, too, in the low fields by Puddledock, where Forges Wood shut off the north-east wind. He trundled the insect-sprayer round the bines, and afterwards loved the smell of his green, sticky hands.

He would have been rightly offended if anyone had told him that his chief pangs of parting were for the farm. None the less, there was a lingering wistfulness in his last dealings with it which was not in his intercourse with his family. He loved his mother, he admired his father, he felt for his brothers and sisters an elder brother's half-anxious, half-contemptuous fondness; but in his last services for Worge, whether in field or barn, there was something almost sacramental. His duties were rites—he was the unconscious priest of that tumble-down altar before which the manure smoked as incense and on which the burnt-offering of his boyhood lay.

He had, too, a hunger for the fields, not only the fields of Worge, but for all those within the Four Roads—

which he did not see as roads leading to adventure, but as boundaries fencing home. When his tasks allowed he would roam in the webbing of tracks that the farms have spun between the lanes—he would go to Starnash or Oxbottom Town, watch the lightless sky grow purple over Muddles Green, and the big stars begin to spark it as the moon hung like a red lamp above Mystole Wood. High on the zenith the sky would be rainy green, and he would watch it deepen to purple round the crimson moon, all unconscious of its beauty, loving it only because it hung above this clay in which his feet were stuck, because from it came the brightness which waked the homely things he had put in the earth to sleep. . . .

Sometimes he would be disturbed by another quest, and would beat slowly up and down on the road outside the shop, longing to go in and yet strangely reluctant. He felt all tied-up and dumb. He could not tell Thyrza Honey what he felt at leaving her any more than he could have told Starnash or Thunders Hill—than he could have told the little brother who lay against him on cold nights—or the dreamy-eyed cows he milked—or even the grinning, whining watch-dog who muddled him with his love. He was dumb, as all these were dumb. He felt unaccountable vrothered at having to leave them all, and that was the utmost he could say ; and yet he knew that in Thyrza's case, at any rate, it was not enough. A man with a better tongue than he would have gone into that shop, and shut himself into the light and tea-smelling warmth, instead of pacing up and down under the cold stars.

9

On the last day of all he plucked up courage. He could not go without saying good-bye, and he had always brought her the big things of his life—from his buying of a horse-rake to the news of the Tribunal's

decision—though each time he had wrapped his need in some penny purchase of tobacco or sweets.

The little bell buzzed and ting'd. The shop was empty and rather dark, for a grey starless dusk was on the fields after a rainy day. The wind rattled the door he had shut behind him, and moaned round the little leaded window banked up with penny toys and tins of fruit. It had a long sighing sweep over the fields from Bird-in-Eye, and just across the road was a willow pond, from which it seemed to drink sadness. Over the banks of papered tins and paint-slopped toys he could see the grey bending backs of the willows, and the steely ruffle of the pond under the wind. His throat grew tight with a word that was stuck in it—"Good-bye."

The door of the back room opened, and there was a leap of firelight and the song of a kettle before it shut.

"Evenun, Mus' Tom," said Mrs. Honey.

"Evenun," said Tom. "A packet of Player's, please."

Thyrza put it on the counter. "Any sweeties?"

"Yes. I'll taake a quarter of bull's-eyes and four-penn'orth of telephones. I woan't leave them behind me this time"—and Tom grinned sheepishly.

"Your brothers and sisters ull miss you," said Thyrza, poking with a knife at the sticky wedge of the bull's-eyes.

"Not more'n I'll miss them and the whole plaace."

"I reckon it's sad to say good-bye."

"Unaccountable sad."

Her eyes were fixed on him very tenderly. She was sorry for Tom Beatup—had always been a little sorry for him—she could not quite tell why.

"It'll be a long time before I see you again, Thyrza."

"Maybe not—you may git leave and come to see us."

He shook his head—"Not yet awhile."

His parcels lay before him, but she did not expect him to go. He was leaning across the counter, staring at her with big, solemn eyes, and she knew that she liked his

face, broad and ruddy as a September moon, that she liked the whole sturdy set of him.

"Stay and have a bit of supper wud me, Tom." It was quite unconsciously that they had become Tom and Thyrza to each other.

The colour burned into his cheeks, but he shook his head.

"No, thank you kindly. I've got to git back hoame. I've a dunnamany things to do this last evenun."

"Then come on your fust leave."

"Reckon I will— Oh, Thyrza!"

His hunger had outrun his shyness. He was trembling. She had lifted her hand to smooth back the soft fuzz of her hair, which in the dusk had become the colour of hay in starlight, and as she dropped her hand, he caught it, and held it, then kissed it. It was warm and wide and soft and rather sticky.

"Oh, Tommy——"

"D'you mind, Thyrza?"

"I?—Lord, no, dear."

He was still holding her hand across the counter, and now he slowly pulled her towards him. Her darling face was coming closer to him out of the shadows; he could smell her hair. . . .

Buzz—Ting.

Their hands dropped and they started upright, both looking utterly foolish. The Reverend Henry Poulett-Smith sniffed an air of constraint as he entered.

"Good evening, Mrs. Honey. I came to leave this—er—notice about the Empire Day performance at the schools. Perhaps you'll be so kind as to show it in the window, and—er—come yourself."

"Thank you, sir. I'll put it here by the tinned salmon. That's what gets looked at most."

"Thank you, Mrs. Honey. Hullo, Beatup—I didn't see you in this dim light."

"I'll be gitting the lamp," said Thyrza.

Tom swept his parcels off the counter into his pockets, and muttered something about "hoame."

"This is your last day, isn't it?" asked the curate.

"Yessir. Off to-morrow."

"Sorry?"

"Middling sorry, for some reasons."

"But it will be a big experience for you."

The curate was young, and sometimes vaguely hankered after that adventure in which no priests but those of godless France might share. It was hard to see it being wasted on a pudding-headed chap like Beatup.

Tom only grunted his reply to this challenge. He was angry with the parson for having come into the shop, discreet as had been his entry. He did not think of waiting till he had gone, for somehow no one, especially a man, ever left Thyrza's shop in a hurry, as if the tranquil dawdle of the shopkeeper communicated itself to her customers, making them lounge and linger long after their purchases were made.

"Good-bye, Mrs. Honey."

"Good-bye, Tom."

"Good-bye, and good luck," said the curate, shaking hands.

The bell buzzed again, and Tom was out in the throb and shudder of the wind, while Thyrza lit the lamp in the house behind him.

IO

When he reached home he found all the family at supper, except Harry, who after a fortnight's doubtful virtue had, on his brother's last night at home, escapaded off with two young Sindens from Little Worge. Mrs. Beatup was inclined to be tearful about it. "Wot we'll do when you're agone, Tom, Lord only knows." Of late she had taken to treating Tom's departure as a volun-

tary, not to say capricious, act, and her frequent lamentations were gabbled with reproach, vague hints that if he had liked he could have prevented the catastrophe—precisely how, she never told him.

Mus' Beatup was not drunk. Only a negative statement could describe him, for neither was he sober. An alcoholic Laodicean, neither hot nor cold, he lolled over the head of the table, and argued with Nell, the pupil-teacher, on the utter futility of the Church of England, or, indeed, any sort of Church. It was characteristic of Nell that she would argue with her father, drunk or sober. She had championed her causes against a far less responsible adversary than she had before her to-day. Her cheeks were pink with refutation, and her little sighs and exclamations and chipped beginnings of phrases popped like corks round Mus' Beatup's droning eloquence—that eloquence which so filled Tom with admiration and made him boast of his father's book-learning among the farms.

"It's as plain as the nose on your face, and has all bin proved over and over again as there wuren't no such persons as Adam and Eve. There's a chap called Darwin's proved as we're the offsprings of monkeys, and a chap called Bradlaugh's proved as we all come out of stuff called prottoplasm—so where are your Adam and Eve, I'd lik to know?"

"But, father, as if it mattered. The Church . . ."

"The Church is there to prove as the world was maade in six days, when it's bin proved over and over again as it hasn't."

"The Church is there for no such thing—it's——"

"I tell you it's bin proved as it's there for that very purpose."

"Who's proved it?"

"Darwin and Huxley and Bradlaugh, and a lot more clever chaps."

"But they lived years ago, and it's——"

"Not so many years ago as your Adam and Eve, and yet you go and believe in them. . . ."

"I don't. Not in the sense. . . ."

"When it's bin proved as there never wur no Adam and Eve. The fust people wur monkeys, descended from prottoplasm, and then caum the missing lynx and then caum us. I tell you it's all bin proved over and over again, and parson chaps and silly gals aun't likely to prove anything different."

Tom listened respectfully, if rather grudgingly, to this learned conversation. He wanted to talk to his father about one or two matters concerning the farm, but knew there would be no chance for him to-night. He kept up at intervals a grunting intercourse with his mother, who wanted every other minute to know where he'd been and where Harry had got to, and what in the Lord's name they were to do without him. Into the bargain, he ate a hearty supper, for though he was in love and rather miserable, he was also a healthy young animal, sharp-set after a day in the open air.

At last the theological argument ended, not because it was any nearer solution or had indeed moved at all from its first premises, but because the end of supper dispersed the combatants, Nell to her work, and Mus' Beatup, ignominiously, to the kitchen sink. Having relieved his stomach of its load of bad beer and half-masticated food, he went grumbling upstairs to bed, wondering what we were all coming to nowadays, and why nobody stopped the war.

Mrs. Beatup reckoned, with a sigh, that she had better go to bed too, as Maaster didn't like it if she disturbed him later. So she lit her candle, and went slowly creaking upstairs, leaving Ivy to clear away the supper. Just where the stairs bent, she suddenly stood still, as if a thought had struck her.

"Tom," she called.

He was cleaning his boots in the outer kitchen, but

when he heard her he ran up to where she stood, thick against her monstrous shadow in the angle of the stairs.

"It's queer as you never think of kissing your mother."

He had not kissed her for weeks, but now, suddenly troubled, he did so.

"I'm sorry, mother."

"And so you may be—on your last night, too."

He stood looking at her sheepishly.

"Well, git down to your business. I musn't linger, or Maaster ull be gitting into bed in his boots."

He went downstairs, feeling suddenly smartingly sorry for his mother as she waddled upwards to this drunkard's bed. He saw that her lot was a hard one.

II

The passage was in darkness, and Tom did not see, but felt, the side door swing open, with a damp drench of wind from the yard. There was a grey mist in the passage. The next minute a white stick-like thing flew out of it, suddenly like the wind, and then bumped into Tom, with the unexpected contact of warm flesh against his hands, and "Oo-er," in Harry's voice.

"Harry . . ."

"Oh, that's you, Tom? Lemme git up and fetch some cloathes."

"But where's those as you went out in?"

"I dunno. I'll tell you afterwards, but I'm coald, and I want my supper."

The slow, facile anger of his type went tingling into Tom's speech and hands.

"Supper! I'm hemmed if you git so much as a bite. Tell me this wunst where you left your cloathes or I'll knock your head off, surelye."

He laid violent hands on Harry, who was, however, far

too slippery to hold. He was free in a minute and dashed into the outer kitchen, slamming the door after him.

When Tom came in he was sitting tailor-fashion on the table, gnawing the top of a cottage loaf. The elder brother could not help laughing at him, he looked such a queer goblin creature.

"Doan't be vrothered, Tom," whined Harry, taking advantage of his relenting—"it's your last night at home."

Tom winced—they were always throwing it at him, his "last night."

"Lucky fur you as it is—and unlucky fur me—and unlucky fur Worge if this is the way you're going on when I'm a-gone. Where've you bin?"

"Only over to Bucksteep, Tom."

"But wot have you done wud your clothes?"

"Mus' Archie's got 'em."

"Wot d'you mean? Spik the truth."

"It's Bible truth. Willie and Peter Sinden and Bob Pix and me thought as how we'd bathe by moonlight in Bucksteep pond, and Mus' Archie's hoame on leave, and he wur walking wud his young woman in the paddock, and he sawed us, and took all our cloathes whiles we wur in the water. He thought as how he'd got us then, and that we couldn't git away wudout our cloathes. But he's found he's wrong, fur we climbed up the far bank into Throws Wood, and ran hoame."

"You mean to tell me as you've come in your skin all the way from Bucksteep?"

Harry nodded, and laughed at some Puckish memory.

"Well, all I wonder is as you wurn't took and put in gaol—you would have been if policeman had met you—and you'll catch your death of cold."

He pulled off his coat and most ungently bundled Harry into it. Then another idea struck him. He groaned, and scratched his head.

"I must write to Mus' Archie this wunst."

"Why, Tom?"

"To git your clothes back. We can't afford to lose a good suit of clothes."

He turned wearily to the cupboard, and took out a penny ink-bottle, a pen, and some cheap writing-paper.

"Tom—he'll know it wur me if you write."

"I can't help that—we must git your clothes back."

"But they were only old cloathes."

"Adone-do, Harry. We can't afford to lose so much as an old shirt. Oh, you're vrothering me to madness wud your doings."

He began to scrawl in his slow, round hand. He was no letter-writer, and found it difficult to put his request into words. He also wanted to plead for Harry, to explain a little of his own hard case, and ask that the matter might be allowed to stop at the scare and scolding Harry had received, for "I am joining up to-morrow, and it is very hard to leave them all like this, from your obedient servant Thomas Beatup."

Harry watched him, bobbing over the sheet, every now and then passing his tongue over his lips in the agony of composition. Then suddenly he slid towards him across the table and put his arm round his neck.

Tom shook him off.

"Git away."

"I'm sorry I'm such a hemmed curse to you, Tom."

"You're a hemmed curse indeed. I ask you to be a man in my plaace, and you're no more than a tedious liddle child."

A sudden sense of the hopelessness of it all came over him—the net in which he struggled, in which he was being dragged away from those he could help and love. He dropped his head in his hands. Harry stood for a moment awestruck beside him, a grotesque figure with Tom's coat hanging over his bare thighs. Then he turned and crept away to bed.

The clock struck nine, and Tom lifted his head. He

was utterly weary, but he knew that if he did not take his letter over to Bucksteep to-night he would not have time in the morning. There was no good leaving it to other hands to deliver, for he felt that his mother would resent its humble tone, and perhaps send instead an angry demand which, by rousing Mus' Archie's rage, might end by landing Harry before the Senlac Bench. So he put on his father's driving coat, which hung in the passage and smelt of manure and stale spirits, and let himself out into the soft, throbbing darkness, lit only by a few dim stars of the Plough.

12

Bucksteep Manor was the smaller kind of country-house, smuggled away from the cross-roads in a larch plantation, with a tennis lawn at the back, and a more open view swinging over a copsed valley to Rushlake Green. It had once been a farmhouse, but a wing had been added in modern style, and inside, the low raftering had been swept away, so that when Tom stood in the dimly-lighted hall, which had once been the kitchen, he could look up to a ceiling dizzily high to his sag-roofed experience.

The Lambs were the aristocracy of Dallington, a neighbourhood strikingly empty of "society" in the country-house sense. They had themselves been yeoman farmers a couple of generations back, and the present squire still interested himself shamefacedly in Bucksteep's hundred acres. The Beatups had but little truck with the Manor; precarious yeomen, no rents or dues demanded intercourse, and Mus' Beatup had often been heard to say that some folks were no better than other folks, for all their airs and acres.

Tom had given his letter to a rustling parlourmaid, and stood meekly waiting for an answer, his large bovine

eyes blinking with sleepiness. From an adjoining room came the throaty music of a gramophone, playing :

“When we wind up the Watch on the Rhine
Everything will be Potsdam fine . . .”

There was girls' laughter, too—probably Miss Marian Lamb and Mus' Archie's intended—and every now and then he heard Mrs. Lamb's voice go rocketing up. He did not feel envious of all this jollity, neither did it grate upon him ; he just stood and waited under the shaded lamps of the hall, and had nearly fallen asleep on his legs when suddenly the door opened, with a flood of light and noise, and shut again behind Mus' Archie.

“Good evening, Beatup. Sorry to have kept you waiting. I couldn't make this out at first—had no idea your young brother was one of the culprits to-night, or I shouldn't have played that trick on 'em.”

“It doan't matter, sir. Harry desarved it. It's only as we can't afford to lose the clothes.”

“No, no, of course not. Come with me and pick his out of the pile, and you can take them home.”

“Thank you, Mus' Archie.”

He followed young Lamb into a little gun-room opening on the hall, and was able to pick out Harry's rather bobtail toilet from a muddle of Sinden and Pix raiment.

“That's all, is it ? Want anything to wrap 'em in ? ”

“No, sir, it aun't worth it. Thank you kindly for letting me have the things.”

“There was never any question of you not having them. I've no right to keep 'em. So you're joining up to-morrow ? ”

He was in uniform, but without his belt. Somehow to Tom he seemed a burlier, browner man than the young squire whom before the war he used to see out hunting, or shooting, or driving girls in his car.

“Yes, I'm joining up, as they say.”

“You don't seem over-pleased about it.”

“I aun't, particular.”

"Well, I'm not going to tell you it's the grandest job on earth, and that all the chaps out there are having the time of their lives. It wouldn't be true, though I expect the Tribunal told you so."

"Yessir; they said as if they were only ten years younger they'd all be on it."

"Of course they did. Well, I've been out there, and I've seen . . . But never mind; you'll find that out for yourself, Beatup. However, I'll say this much—it isn't a nice job, or a grand job, or even a good job; but it's a job that's got to be done, and when it's done we'll like to think that Sussex chaps helped do it."

Tom's heart warmed a little towards Mus' Archie. He was making him feel as he had felt when Bill Putland said, "We're all eighteenth Sussex hereabouts."

"It aun't the going as un vrother me, if it wurn't fur leaving Worge. I'm fretted as the plaace ull land at the auctioneer's if I'm long away. You see, I've always done most of the work, in my head as well as wud my hands. Faather, he aun't a healthy man, and the others aun't much help nuther. There's only Harry lik to be any use, and he's such an unaccountable limb of wickedness—for ever at his tricks—to-night's only one of them."

"Perhaps he'll pull himself together and work for Worge when he sees you've gone to fight for it."

This was new light on the matter for Tom. Hitherto he had always thought of himself as deserting Worge in its hour of need—it had never occurred to him that his going was the going of a champion, not of a traitor.

"Maybe it's as you say, Mus' Archie. Leastways, we'll hope so."

They were in the hall again now, and the gramophone was singing in its spooky voice, "You called me Baby Doll a year ago." Tom slowly turned the handle of the front door, sidling out on to the step.

"Thank you for the clothes, Mus' Archie. I'll try and talk some sense into Harry before I go."

"Good night, Beatup, and good luck to you. I expect I'll see some more of you in the near future. All the chaps round here seem to be drafted into the eighteenth. Bill Putland will be in our little crowd, and Jerry Sumption—there'll be quite a Dallington set at Waterheel."

"I hope I'll be with you, Mus' Archie."

"I hope you will, Beatup. Good night."

"Good night, sir."

The door shut, and he was out in the drive, where the larches swung against the moon.

Archie Lamb went back into the drawing-room, and put a new record on the gramophone.

"Queer chap, Beatup," he said to his mother. "I don't know how he'll shape. He looks strong and steady, but I should say about as smart as a mangold-wurzel."

13

Tom swung along the dim road, where the shadows ran before him. The new-risen moon looked over the hedge, an amber disc just past the full, swimming against the wind from Satanstown. In the heart of the wind seemed still to beat the pulse of those far-off guns, the ghost of their day-long thunder. Over and over in his mind Tom turned his new thought—that he was going to fight for Worge.

In a quarter of an hour he had come to Sunday Street. He could see the moonlight lying like frost on the southward slope of the roofs, and the windows of the Bethel were ghostly with it, as they stared away to the marshes. The Bethel alone seemed awake in the little huddle of sleeping cottages—it had a strange look of watchfulness and waiting, its gaunt Georgian windows never had that comfortable blinking air of the cottage lattices . . . Tom did not like the Bethel at night.

He looked across the road to the Horselunges, where Mr. Sumption lived. A crack of light showed under the blind of the minister's room, and Tom's heart gave a little thump of self-reproach, for he had not till then thought of saying good-bye to him. He had not seen much of Mr. Sumption lately, and had been too much absorbed in his own concerns to think of him, but now he made up his mind to call and say good-bye ; it was past ten o'clock and he was very tired and sleepy, nevertheless he walked up to the door of the Horselunges and knocked.

Mrs. Hubble was in bed, as the hour demanded, so the door was opened by her lodger.

" Hello, Tom. Anything the matter ? Do they want me at Worge ? "

Mr. Sumption was always childishly eager for some demand on his pastoral ministrations, a demand which was seldom made, as he had a disruptive bedside manner and the funds of his chapel did not admit of the doles which made sick Dallington people endure the consolations of the Church.

" No, thank you, they doan't. I've just come to say good-bye."

The minister's forehead clouded—

" Oh, you've remembered me at last, have you ? Thought it just as well not to forget old friends before you go off to make new ones. Come in."

Tom, who had expected this greeting, followed Mr. Sumption upstairs into the room which he called his study, but which had few points of difference from any cottage living-room in Sunday Street. There was a frayed carpet with a lot of dirt trodden into it, and a sun-sucked wall-paper adhering as closely as possible to walls complicate of beams and bulges. A solitary bookshelf supported *Jessica's First Prayer*, *Edwin's Trial or The Little Christian Witness*, and kindred works, cheek-by-jowl with Burton's *Four Last Things* and a cage of

white mice. There was another cage hanging in the window, containing a broken-winged thrush which the pastor, after the failure of many anathemas, had bought from one of those mysterious gangs of small boys which prowl round villages. An old, old cat sat before the empty grate, too decrepit to make more than one attempt a day on the thrush or the mice, and now purring wheezily in the intervals of scratching a cankered ear.

On the table was a wild, unwieldy parcel, from whose bursting sides the contents were already beginning to ooze forth.

"I'm packing a parcel for Jerry," said the minister. "I'd just finished when you knocked."

"It looks as if it was coming undone," said Tom.

"So it does"—and Mr. Sumption glanced deprecatingly at his handiwork. "If only I had some sealing-wax . . . but the shop's shut."

"It'll be open to-morrow," said Tom, and pictured Thyrza pulling up the blind and dusting the salmon-tins in the window . . . long after he had gone to catch the early train from Hailsham.

"Well, to-morrow's time enough, as I can't post it before then. It ud be a pity for anything to get lost. There's three shillings' worth of things in that parcel."

"Have you had any more letters from Jerry?"

"Yes, I had one yesterday"—no need to tell Tom there had been no others—"He wants chocolate and cigarettes, and I put in a tin of cocoa besides, and some little squares to make soup of. He'll be unaccountable pleased."

"How's he gitting on?"

"Valiant. He likes being along of the other lads. The only thing that worrits him is your sister."

"My sister?"

"Yes, your sister Ivy. Seemingly she never answered a postcard he wrote her ten days back, and you knows he's unaccountable set on Ivy."

"It aun't no use, Mus' Sumption. Ivy's got no thought for him, I'm certain sure, and he's only wasting time over her."

The minister's comely face darkened, and he cracked his fingers once or twice.

"It's a pity, a lamentable pity. That boy of mine's crazy on Ivy Beatup. Are you sure she doesn't care about him, Tom?"

"Well, who knows wot a gal thinks? I can only put two and two together. But seemingly if she'd cared she'd have answered his postcard."

"Could you put in a word for him?"

Young Beatup shook his head—

"I woan't meddle. If Ivy doan't care I can't maake her, and I reckon mother's unaccountable set against it too."

He had said the wrong thing. Mr. Sumption's eyes became like burning pits. He swung his hands up and cracked them like a pistol.

"Set against it, is she? Set against my Jerry? Maybe he isn't good enough for her—a clergyman's son for a farmer's daughter!"

"I never said naun of that," mumbled Tom, uneasily, remembering his mother's reference to "gipsy muck."

"It's I as might be set against it," continued the minister. "I tell you that boy's been bred and cut above your sister. I never sent him to a board school along of farmers' children—I taught him myself, everything I learned at college. He'd know as much as I do if he hadn't forgotten it. Yet I'm not proud; I know the boy wants your sister Ivy and ull do something silly if he can't get her, so when he writes to me, 'Where's Ivy? Find out why she didn't answer my postcard, and tell her I'll go mad if she doesn't take some notice of me'—why, then, I do my best—and get told my son's not good enough for your father's daughter."

"I never told you any such thing," said Tom dog-

gedly, "but I woan't spik to Ivy. She knows her own business best. If I were you I'd tell Jerry straight as no good ull come of his going after her. She doan't want him—I'm certain sure of that."

The pastor's wrath had died down into something more piteous.

"I daresay you're right, Tom, and maybe I did wrong to speak like that. After all, I was only a blacksmith till the Lord called me away . . . I pray that He may not require my boasting of me."

"Well, I'm unaccountable sorry about Ivy being lik that, but I thought it better to spik plain."

Mr. Sumption sat down rather heavily at the table.

"O Lord, how shall I tell Jerry? If I tell him he'll do something wild, sure as he's Jerry Sumption."

"Doan't tell him. He'll find out for himself soon enough."

Mr. Sumption groaned.

"Tom Beatup," he said slowly, "I reckon you think I'm a faithless, unprofitable steward so to set my heart on human flesh and blood. But you'll understand a bit of what I feel . . . some day, when you're the father of a son."

14

The pale morning ray came slanting over the sky from Harebeating towards the last stars. Slowly the trees and hedges loomed out against the trembling yellow pools of the dawn. Colours woke in the fields, soft hazy greens, and blues and greys that ran together like smoke . . . ponds began to gleam among the spinneys, discs of mirrored sky, that from lustreless white became glassy yellow, then kindled from glass to fire, then smouldered from fire to rust.

Tom saw the window square light up and frame the familiar picture of a life's mornings—the oast-house, the lombardy poplar topping the barn, the little patch of

distant fields seen between the oast and the jutting farmhouse gable. The bed was pulled up close to the window, to allow of the door being opened, and he could lie on his side and look straight out at the loved common things which perhaps he might never see just so again.

It all looked very quiet, and rather cold, and the early sunless light gave it a peculiar lifelessness, as if it was something painted, or cut in cardboard. Even Tom was conscious of its cold, dreamlike quality ; he always said that " the yard looked corpsy at break o' day." Then the distant view of little fields suddenly swam into golden light, as a long finger of sunlight stroked the barn-roofs, then stabbed in at the window, throwing a shaft of dancing golden motes across the room. Tom rose, climbed out of bed over Zacky, and in about three square feet of floor space shaved and dressed. Then he went downstairs, unlocked the house door and stole out to his last morning's work.

No one was about ; it was not till more than an hour later that the two antique farm-hands, Elphick and Juglery, came up from Worge Cottages. By that time Tom had milked the cows, mixed the chicken food, and driven the horses down to Forges field. He gave the two unskilled labourers their orders for the day as if he expected to be there to see them carried out. By that time Ivy was hunting for eggs, and Mrs. Beatup was struggling with the kitchen fire, while Mus' Beatup, in practical, unlearned mood, had gone to the Sunk field to inspect the ewes.

As Ivy came out of the hen-house and crossed the yard, cheery, healthy, blowsy, with eggs in a bowl, Tom had a sudden thought of giving her Mr. Sumption's message. But he held his tongue. He had meant what he said when he told the minister he was not going to meddle. He had long been convinced of the fact that his sister knew her own business ; besides, Jerry . . . that lousy gipsy chap . . . Pastor might say he was

getting on valiant, but all Dallington knew that he had been given seven days C.B. within a week of his joining.

So, with nothing for Ivy but a nod, Tom went in to breakfast. Time was short, but the breakfast was still in a rudimentary state. Mrs. Beatup fought with the kitchen fire among whorls of smoke, while Nell, coughing pathetically, laid the table. Harry in a fit of brotherly love was cleaning Tom's best boots ready for his journey to Lewes—no one ever went to Lewes in any but Sunday clothes.

"Oh, is that you, Tom? I hope as you aun't in a hurry. This fire's bewitched. Nell, give your brother a cut off the loaf. You'd better git started, Tom, or you'll lose your train."

So Tom's last breakfast at Worge was eaten in confusion and mess, the family dropping in one by one for cuts off the loaf or helpings of cold bacon spotted with large blisters of grease. Last of all the breakfast arrived, in the shape of the tea-pot, and a special boiled egg for Tom. He was not able to do more than gulp down the egg and scald himself with the tea. Then it was time to go. He had already tied up a few little things in a handkerchief—a razor, a piece of soap, an old frosted Christmas card which for some obscure reason he treasured—so there was nothing to do but to say good-bye and beat it for Hailsham, a good seven miles.

Mus' Beatup put down his tea-cup and looked solemn.

"Well, good-bye, my lad. I reckon you've got to go. Everyone's off to fight now, seemingly, so I suppose you must do wot others do. Not that I think so much of this war as some folks seem to—it's bin going on nigh two years now, and I can't see as we're any of us a penny the better off. Howsumdever . . ."

"He's going to stop it," said Nell, her face pink.

"Ho, is he? Well, I've no objection. Maybe I'll write you a letter, Tom, when Maudie calves."

"I'd be much obliged if you would, faather, and tell

me how the wheat does this year, and them new oats by the Street."

"Good-bye, Tom," said Harry. "I shall miss you unaccountable."

"And I'll miss you, too," said Zacky, "but there'll be more room in the bed."

Tom kissed them sheepishly all round, then walked out of the door without a word.

He was in the yard, when he heard footsteps creaking after him, and turned round to see his mother.

"Wait a bit, Tom," she panted; "I'll go wud you to the geate."

He was surprised, but it did not strike him to say so. They walked down the drive together almost in silence, the boy hanging his head. Mrs. Beatup sniffed and choked repeatedly.

"Doan't go near those Germans, Tom," she said, when they came to a standstill. "If you do, you'll be killed for certain sure."

"I'll go where I'm put, surelye," said Tom gloomily.

"Well, be careful, that's all. Kip well behind the other lads, and doan't go popping your head over walls or meddling wud cannons. And kip your feet dry, Tom, and doan't git into temptation."

"I promise, mother," he mumbled against her neck, and they kissed each other many times before she let him go.

The Rifle Volunteer looked down from his sign, where he stood in the grey uniform and mutton-chop whiskers of an earlier dispensation, and stared at the stocky, shambling little figure that trudged its unwilling way to sacrifice—past Worge Cottages, stewing in the sunshine like pippins, past Egypt Farm (which Bill Putland would leave later and more conveniently in his father's dog-cart), past the shop, with a glance half shy, half beseeching, at the drawn blinds, past the willow pond, out of Sunday Street, into the long yellow road that led to the unsought, undesired adventure.

PART II

JERRY

I

MRS. BEATUP'S tears ran down her face as she hurried back up the drive, but she wiped them vigorously away with her apron, and had nothing but her red eyes to show when she entered the kitchen. Everyone had gone, except Ivy and Nell. The former had not finished her hearty breakfast, the latter was packing her books for school, and some sort of a wrangle was going on between them. Mrs. Beatup heard Nell call Ivy "vulgar" just as she came into the room. Ivy laughed, truly a vulgar performance with her mouth full.

"Now, you two gals, doan't you start quarrelling just when your brother's a-gone ; maybe fur ever."

"We aun't quarrelling," said Ivy. "I've told her she's sweet on parson, that's all."

"All !" sniffed Nell. "Maybe you think it's nothing to have your vulgar mind making out my—my friendship with Mr. Poullett-Smith's the same as yours with—with—anyone that ull let you make sheep's eyes at him."

"Nell !" cried her mother. "For shaum !"

"Well, I don't care"—the younger girl's anger had been roused by many coarse flicks—"everyone talks about Ivy's goings-on."

"I doan't care if they do," said Ivy cavernously in her tea-cup. "Reckon it's cos they're jealous of me gitting the boys."

"Well, Ivy," said Mrs. Beatup, "I doan't hold wud your goings-on, nuther ; but anyway you're useful."

"I'm earning money, though," said Nell ; "at least I shall be when my third year's up."

"And how soon ull that be, I'd lik to know ? There you go, out all day, when you might be helping us at home, and not a penny to show fur it."

"Mother, I've told you again and again—why won't you understand ?—I'm being given lessons in exchange for those I give myself, and——"

"Lessons ! A girl turned seventeen ! I call it lamentable. I'd a-done wud my schooling at twelve."

"But you know I have to pass an exam . . ."

"I doan't see no 'have' in it. Better kip at hoame and help me wud the cooking. Out all day and bring home no money ! I doan't call that——"

"Well, I'm off," said Ivy, getting up and wiping her mouth. "You two are lik a couple of barndoor cocks, walking round and round each other. I've summat better to do—I've the passage to scrub"—and she took her sacking apron off the nail.

"Where's Zacky ?" asked Mrs. Beatup. "Has he started for school ?"

"Yes, he's gone wud the Sindens."

"And Harry ?"

Ivy laughed. "Oh Harry's along of faather, in the Sunk field—unaccountable good and hardworking to-day, because Tom's a-gone ; seemingly, he'd sooner please him now he aun't here to see than when he was here fretting his heart out over Harry's lazy bones."

"Well, I'm glad as someone remembers my poor boy's gone, and is lik to be killed."

Mrs. Beatup's tears burst out afresh, but Ivy comforted her with a kiss and a clap and a few cheery words, and soon had her interested in the various bootstains on the passage-floor. "Cow-dung, that's faather ; and

horse-dung, that's Tom ; and sheep-dung, that's Juglery ; and that miry clay's jest Zacky spanneling. . . ."

2

Nell put on her hat and coat and started for school. A neat, shabby little figure, with her town hat pulled down over her soft hair, she walked quickly between dust-powdered hedges to Brownbread Street, panting a little, because she was anæmic, and also because she was still a trifle indignant. Nell did not view life and the War as her family viewed them. Her different education had made them not quite such matters of bread-and-cheese. She alone at Worge had felt the humiliation—as distinct from the inconvenience—of Tom's conscription. She had always despised him because he did not volunteer during the early stages of the War, and when the Conscription Act came into force she despised him still more for his appeal to the Tribunal. She felt that she could never think proudly of him, knowing how unwillingly he had gone, knowing that he cared for nothing except leaving Worge, that he never thought of the great cause of righteousness he was to fight for, or understood the mighty issues of his unwilling warfare.

The rest of the family were all of a block. To her mother the War was merely a matter of prices and scarcities, to her father it was drink restrictions and the closing of public-houses, to Ivy it was picture postcards and boys in khaki, to Harry the unwilling performance of tasks which would otherwise have been done by more efficient hands, to Zacky the obscure manœuvres of a gang of small boys whose imaginations had been touched by militarism. To Nell alone belonged the fret and anxiety of the times, the shock of bad news, the struggle of ineffectual small labours to win her a place in the great woe.

To-day she was early for school, as she had meant to be, for at the church she stopped and sat down in the porch. St. Wilfred's, Brownbread Street, was only a chapel-of-ease under the mother church of Dallington. It was new-built of sandstone, an unfortunate symbol of that Rock against which the gates of hell shall not prevail. The interior, glimpsed through the open door, was dim and mediæval, the first effect due to the deep tones of the stained-glass windows, where the saints wore robes of crimson and sapphire and passional violet, and the latter to the several dark oil paintings, and the thick gilt tracery of the screen, through which the altar showed richly coloured, with one winking red light before it.

The curate-in-charge of Brownbread Street was of mediæval tendencies, and did his best, both in service and sermon, to transport his congregation from the woodbine-age to the age of pilgrimages and monasteries, with the result that, with unmediæval licence, they sought illicit and heretical refreshment in Georgian Bethels and Victorian Tabernacles, where they could sing good Moody and Sankey tunes, instead of treacherous Gregorians and wobbling Plainsong.

But Nell loved the low, soft, creeping tones of Gregory's mode, loved the dimness, the mystery, the faint echo of Sarum . . . and if in her love was a personal element which she denied, the church was not less a refuge from the coarse frustrations of her everyday life, such as the Forge was to Mr. Sumption and the Shop had been to Tom.

To-day the priest was at the altar, saying the Last Gospel. Nell could just see him from where she sat. He would be out in a couple of minutes. She watched him glide off into the shadows, then she rose and walked down to the little wicket-gate, where the path from the porch met the path from the vestry. There was more colour in her cheeks than usual.

Now and then she looked anxiously across the road at the schoolhouse clock, where the large hand was creeping swiftly towards the hour. From the clock her eyes slewed round to the vestry door. At last the handle shook, and out came Mr. Poulett-Smith, walking hurriedly, with his cassock flapping round his legs. He did not seem to see Nell till he had nearly walked into her.

"Oh—er—good morning, Miss Beatup. I beg your pardon."

"Good morning, Mr. Poulett-Smith. I—I wanted to tell you I'm so sorry I haven't finished that book you lent me. I'm afraid I've kept it a terrible time."

Her words came with a rush, blurred faintly in the last of a Sussex accent, and her eyes were fixed on his face with an almost childish eagerness which he could scarcely fail to notice.

"Oh, please don't trouble. Keep the book as long as you like—the *Sermons of St. Gregory*, isn't it?"

"Yes—I think they're wonderful," breathed Nell, hoping he would never know how difficult she found them to understand.

"They are indeed, and so stimulating."

The Rev. Henry Poulett-Smith was a tall man, with a long nose, a slight stoop, and a waxy brownish skin that made him look like one of his own altar candles. As he spoke to Nell, he kept on glancing up the street, and when a girl on a bicycle came round the corner, he moved a few steps out into the road and took off his hat.

"Good morning, Miss Lamb."

Marian Lamb, who was in Red Cross uniform, jumped off her bicycle and shook hands with him before she shook hands with Nell Beatup.

"On your way to the hospital, I see."

"Yes. I'm on morning duty this week."

"Do you prefer that to the afternoons?"

"Not in summer. I do in winter, though."

Nell felt ignored and insulted. She made no effort to join in this sprightly dialogue. There was something in the curate's manner towards the other girl which seemed to stab her through with a sense of her inferiority, with memories of the coarse, muddling life of Worge to which she belonged. It was not that he showed more courtesy, but he seemed to show more freedom . . . he was more at his ease with one of his own class.

Her cheeks burned. Of course she was not his equal. He might talk to her and lend her books, but he did it only out of kindness ; probably looked upon it as a superior form of parish relief—doled the books as he doled blankets. . . . She shrugged away, and the movement made him at once turn to her with a remark :

“ Have you been over the hospital, Miss Beatup ? ”

“ No—I've never had time . . . and I must hurry off now. Good morning ! ”

Even as she spoke she noticed that her voice was thick and drawly, unlike Miss Lamb's sharp, clear tones. She gripped her satchel and hurried across the road to the schoolhouse.

3

During the next few days the most remarkable sight at Worge was Harry's industriousness. For nearly a week he rose at five, fed the pigs and helped with the milking, and during the whole day he was available for carting, digging, dunging, or anything else he had formerly fled from. He helped Elphick spray the young fuggles down by Forges and the Sunk Field, he took a cartload of roots over to Three Cups Corner, he groomed the horses and plaited their manes, he compelled Zacky with threats of personal violence to spend Saturday afternoon scaring birds from the gooseberries, instead of, with six other little boys, carrying out an enveloping movement on Punnetts Town, with three-ha'pence to

spend on sweets in the captured citadel. On the occasion of Mus' Beatup's next lapse, he stalled the cows and doctored the mare, and also, with much foresight, took off and hid his father's boots, which prevented both his going to bed in them and his throwing them at his wife.

It would have been well if this virtuous state could have lasted till the hay harvest. This was early, for there was a spell of heat in May, and the fields were soon parched. The air was full of the smell of ripe hayseed, of the baking glumes of the oats, of the hot, sickly stew of elder-flower and meadowsweet. Along the Four Roads eddies of dust flew from under the wheels and caked the grass and fennel-heads beside the way, and in the ruts of the little lanes the bennet and rest-harrow sprouted, with the thick-stalked sprawly pig-nut, and ragged robin. Unfortunately, all this scent and heat made Harry remember a wood over by Cade Street, where he had once lain and watched the moon rise rusty beyond Lobden's House. It was unfortunate that he had such a memory, for it had more than once been his undoing. Somewhere under Harry's skin, mixed with the sluggish currents of his country blood, was a strain of poetry and imagination. He cared nothing for books, nothing for beauty, nothing for music (except, perhaps, when they sang "Diadem" in the Bethel at dusk), and yet every now and then something would pull him from the earth he toiled on—a thing he was unaware of three weeks out of the four, seeing only the sods cleaving together—something would call him from meadow-hills that swept up their broomy cones to the sky, an adventure would call from the Four Roads, a longing would call from the moon . . . and off he would go to Stunts Green, to Starnash, Oxbottom's Town, or Burnt Kitchen—just as, after a sober week, Mus' Beatup would go off to the Rifle Volunteer.

His promise to Tom had made him resist the cruder temptations of ratting Sindens or bird's-nesting Kad-

wells ; but now it seemed to pull the other way. His brother was the only person he was in any degree afraid of, and he was safe at Waterheel, no longer his father's vicar, waiting with barnyard discipline for the truant's return.

So Harry went off to that wood at Cade Street, and spent the night there, in a hollow tree, watching the big yellow stars shuddering above the ash-boughs like candles in the wind, and sleeping with his head in a soft mush of last year's leaves, that sent him back with his cheeks all smeary, and his hair caked with leaf-mast.

That was the day of the haycutting, when Mus' Beatup and Juglery and Elphick sweated with bent backs in the field. Worge possessed a horse-rake, but the cutting had all to be done by hand, and the men's backs ached and scorched in the sun, and their sweat dropped on their scythes. This labour, as was only natural, started in Mus' Beatup a fearful thirst, and that night was "one of his bad nights"—one of the worst, in fact, for he threw the candlestick at his wife as well as his boots, and would not let her come to bed, so that she had to sleep with Ivy and Nell.

Harry felt rather ashamed, and tried hard to atone the next day by working himself sick. Mrs. Beatup and Ivy helped too, since haymaking was the one kind of field work which the women did not feel it derogatory to perform. Ivy was a whacking girl, nearly as good as a man ; but Mus' Beatup would never have dreamed of asking her to help fill Tom's empty place. If town girls thought so little of themselves as to enrol for farm work, that was no concern of his, but he was hemmed if he'd have his wife and daughter meddling with anything beyond the fowl-house, and as for employing other women whose dignity mattered less to him—and, apparently, to themselves—he'd sooner Worge went to the auctioneer's, just to teach the government a lesson.

4

So Worge muddled through its haymaking, and then the shearing ; and Harry was sometimes idle and sometimes industrious, and Mus' Beatup was sometimes drunk and sometimes sober. The oats in the Street Field and the field at the back of the Rifle Volunteer were slowly parching to the colour of dust, though thick green shadows rippled in them, and told how far off still the harvest was. They were spring-sown potato-oats, chosen by Tom on account of their vigorous constitution, though otherwise not very well suited to the clays of Sunday Street. He had manured them at their sowing with rape-cake, nursed their first sproutings, and now in every letter enquired after their progress. "Keep an eye on them, dear father, for the Lord's sake, and do not let them stand after they're ripe, or they will shed there seeds for certain sure, being potatos."

Tom had been some weeks now at Waterheel in the Midlands, a private in the Sussex Regiment, with an elaborate and mystifying address, which his family found the greatest difficulty in cramming into the envelope. They did not write to him as often as he wrote to them, in spite of the fact that they were six to one. But then they were not far from home, dreaming of the old fields, longing for the old faces.

On the whole though, Tom was happy enough. He found his new life strange, but not totally uncongenial. A comfortable want of imagination made it possible for him to put Worge out of mind, now that it was also out of sight, and he was among lads of his own age, old acquaintances some of them—Kadwell of Stilliands Tower, and two Viners from Satanstown, Bill Putland, Jerry Sumption. There was Mus' Archie, too, with a nod and a kind word now and then to intensify that "feeling of Sussex chaps" which was not quite such an

uncommon one now ; and there was Mus' Dixon, Mus' Archie's elder brother, who had lived in London and written for the papers before the War, and now used his sword to cut the leaves of books—so his orderly said—yet was a brave man none the less, and a good officer, though he hated the life as much as his brother loved it.

The family at Worge were surprised to find that Tom's best pal was Bill Putland. In Sunday Street he had had very little to do with the Squire's cheeky chauffeur, and there had always been a gnawing rivalry between Egypt and Worge. But now that they had joined up together, and been drafted into the same company, sharing the same awkwardness and fumbings, a friendship sprang up between them, and thrived in the atmosphere of their common life. Putland was a much smarter recruit than Beatup, but this did not cause ill-feeling, for Bill did much to help Tom, passing on to him the tips he picked up so much more quickly than his friend, with the result that Tom got through the mangold-wurzel stage sooner than Mus' Archie had expected. Tom on his side was humbly conscious of Bill's superiority. " He's been bred up different from us," he wrote home to Worge. " You can see that by the way he talks and everything, and he's a sharper chap than me by a long chalk. But he's unaccountable good-hearted, and he helps me with my leathers after he's done his own, for he's a sight quicker than me."

Tom more often asked for news than he gave it. After all, life at Waterheel Camp did not consist of much besides drills and route-marchings, with relaxations at the Y.M.C.A. hut, and occasional visits to the town. No one at Worge would care to hear the daily doings of such a life, and still less were they likely to understand it. He was uneasily conscious of what his father would say about these things at the Rifle Volunteer. " Took my boy away from his honest work, and all they do is to

keep him forming fours and traipsing about the country and playing dominoes at the Y.M.C.A. That's wot the Governmunt spends our money on," etc. etc. And Tom was now soldier enough to resent any criticism of the Army from outside it.

In other quarters though, it appeared he was not so reticent. After a while his family discovered that Thyrza Honey was hearing from him pretty regularly. Moreover, one day Mrs. Beatup, buying candles, found Thyrza wearing a regimental button mounted as a brooch, and was told it was a gift from Tom.

"He's sweet on her," said Ivy, when the news was told.

"Him—he's just a bit of a boy," said his mother.

"The Army maakes men unaccountable sudden."

"Well, anyway, she's four years older than he is, and wot he can see in her is more'n I can say."

"She's got a bit o'money though," said Mus' Beatup. "I shan't put a spoke in his wheel if he wants to marry her."

"Him marry! Wot are you thinking of, Ned? He's only a bit of a boy, as I've told you. Besides, she aun't got no looks; she's just a plain dump of a woman, and a boy likes a pretty faace."

"Mrs. Honey's middling pretty," said Ivy, "with her colour and teeth and all."

"You've got queer notions of pretty. Why, only yesterday Mrs. Sinden wur saying to me as she can't think wot Sam Honey ever saw in Thyrza Shearne. And you can't git naun out of her, she's slow as a cow, and she looks at you lik a cow chewing the cud . . ."

Nell broke in—

"You're all taking it for granted that Mrs. Honey would have Tom if she was given the chance. Maybe he'd be quite safe even if he asked her."

"Nonsense, my girl," cried Mus' Beatup. "A woman ud taake any man as wur fool enough to ask her ;

if a woman's unwed you may reckon she's never been asked."

Ivy laughed loudly at this, and Nell turned crimson.

"Women aren't going quite so cheap as you think."

"Oh, aun't they!—when it's bin proved as there's twice as many of 'em as there's men. I tell you, when there's a glut of turnips, the price goes down."

"There aren't twice as many women as men. Miss Goldsack was saying only the other day that——"

"And I tell you it's bin proved as there are, and when the War's over there'll be more still, and they'll be going about weeping and hollering and praying to the men to taake them."

"They won't. They'll have something better to do. This War's teaching women to work, and——"

"Work! I wudn't give a mouldy onion fur women's work. . . ."

And so on, and so on.

5

Thyrza herself was a little surprised to hear so often from Tom, and the brooch was a piece of daring she had never expected. It is true that from time to time she sent him presents of chocolate and cigarettes, but his letters were much more than an acknowledgment of these. They were not love-letters, but Thyrza knew that they contained more confidences than those he sent to Worge—she was familiar with all the common round of his day, from *réveillé* to lights-out. He told her about the men he liked and those he didn't, about his drills and fatigues, about his food and Cookie's queer notions of a stew—Thyrza knew what was an "army biscuit," a "choky," a "gor' blimey," and the number of stripes worn respectively by "God Almighty," "swank" and "goat." Scarcely a week passed without one of those

thin yellowish envelopes, with the red triangle in the corner, slipping under the shop door—addressed in smeary, indelible pencil, and smelling of woodbines.

She noticed a growing assurance in his style—partly due, perhaps, to the friendliness of her replies, partly, no doubt, to the growing manhood in him. She had always looked on Tom as a kind, slow chap, with very little to say for himself, and not too much thinking going on either, but with an unaccountable good heart. Now she realised that the Army was smartening him up, giving him confidence, enlarging his ideas. Thyrza was only a countrywoman herself, born within ten miles of where she lived now, but she did not fail to notice or to respect this growth in Tom. “He’s gitting new ideas in his head, and he’s waking up a bit. I shan’t lik him the less for being readier wud his tongue, surelye.”

One of the new ideas which got into Tom’s head at Waterheel was the desirability—indeed, the urgency—of having a “girl.” All the chaps had girls—Bill Putland wrote to Polly Sinden at Little Worge, though he had taken very little notice of her while he was at home; Jerry Sumption wrote half-threatening, half-appealing scrawls to Ivy Beatup; Kadwell and Viner had sweet-hearts at the Foul Mile and the Trulilows—every evening at the Y.M.C.A. a hundred indelible pencils travelled to and fro from tongue to paper in the service of that god who campaigns with the god of war, and occasionally snatches his victories. There was also the need to receive letters—a need which Tom had never felt before, but now ached in his breast, when at post-time he saw other men walk away tearing envelopes, while he stood empty-handed. Thyrza wrote more often and more fully than his mother, and he would answer quickly, to make her write again. So closer and closer between them was drawn that link of smudged envelopes and ruled note-paper, with their formalities of “Your letter received quite safe,” and “Hoping this finds you well, as it leaves

me at present"—till the chain was forged which should bind them for ever.

Thyrza pondered this in her heart. She was used to much indefinite courtship, most of it just before lamp-time in her own little shop, with the prelude of a "penn'orth of bull's-eyes for the children" or "a packet of Player's, please." She had also been definitely courted once or twice in her short widowhood—by Bourner of the Forge, a widower with five sturdy children, and Hearsfield of Mystole. She was a type of girl who, while appealing little to her fellow-women, who "never cud see naun in Thyrza Honey," yet had a definite attraction for men, by reason of that same softness and slowness for which her own sex despised her. She had no particular wish to marry again, and at the same time no particular objection. Her first marriage had not been so happy as to make her anxious to repeat it, but it had also lacked those elements of degradation which make a woman shrink from trusting herself a second time to a master. There was too much business and too much gossip in her life for her to feel her loneliness as a widow, and yet she sometimes craved for the little child which had died at birth two years ago—she "cud do wud a child," she sometimes said.

Tom Beatup attracted her strongly. He was much her own type—slow, ruminative, and patient as the beasts he tended—yet she saw him as a being altogether more helpless than herself, one less able to think and plan, one whom she could "manage" tenderly. He was not so practical as she, and more in need of affection, of which he got less. Thyrza sometimes pictured his round dark head upon her breast, her arm about him, holding him there in the crook of it, both lover and child. . . .

From the material point of view, the match was not a good one; but Thyrza was comfortably off, and her miniature trade was brisk. They were both too un-

sophisticated to make a barrier of her little stock of worldly goods—he had his pay, so his independence would not suffer, and she would have a separation allowance into the bargain. He was a slow wooer, and the tides of his boldness had never risen again to the level of that sticky kiss he had given her hand as she served the bull's-eyes—but she was sure of him, and, being Thyrsa, “slow as a cow,” had no objection to waiting.

6

Another woman in Sunday Street was being courted from the Waterheel Y.M.C.A., but she did not fill her part as comfortably as Thyrsa. Not that Ivy Beatup had much real concern for Jerry Sumption's passion, beating against her indifference as a wave beats and breaks against a rock. Her chief trouble was that Jerry now threw out hints of an approaching leave, and though she had no objection to his mingling rage and tenderness on paper, she disliked the thought of having to confront them mingled in his gipsy face.

The minister's son was one of Ivy's mistakes—she made mistakes occasionally, as she would herself acknowledge with a good-humoured grin. But they were never very serious. And, as the saying is, she knew how to take care of herself. Unfortunately, Jerry had given her more than ordinary trouble. After some years of standoffishness and suspicion—for Mrs. Beatup had never liked her children to play with the gipsy woman's son—Ivy and Jerry had somehow been thrown together during his last holiday from Erith, and she had good-naturedly allowed him to kiss her and take her to Senlac Fair, as she would have allowed any decent lad on leave. It was unlucky that what had been to her no more than a bit of fun should be for Jerry the tinder to set his body and soul alight. Ivy, more buxom than beautiful, and,

with her apple-face and her barley-straw hair, typical of those *gaujos* his mother's people had always distrusted, somehow became his earth and sky. He loved her, and went after her as the tide after the moon.

Ivy tried to detach him by the various means known to her experience. For a long time she ignored his letters and postcards. Then when these continued to pour upon her, she sent a cold, careless reply, which had the contrary effect of making his furnace seven times hotter ; so that her next letter was warmed unconsciously by the flame of his, and she saw that instead of having shaken him off, she had gone a step further in his company.

No doubt the best thing to do was to tell him to his face that she would not have him. He would not be the first chap she had told this, but Ivy had an unaccountable shrinking from repeating the process with Jerry. There was in him a subtle essence, a mystifying quality—perhaps it was no more than the power of a sharper life and death—which made him different from the other lads she knew, and struck terror into her country soul. He was the first man she had been ever so little afraid of. Ivy had the least imagination of all the Beatups. That spark which sent Nell to the church, and Harry to the woods, which made Tom feel more than roots and clay in the earth on which he trod, and Zacky sometimes almost think himself a British army corps, even that little spark had never flickered up in Ivy's honest heart. Her world was made of things she could taste and see and hear and smell and handle, and very good things she found them. She resented the presence in her life of something which responded to none of these tests. Jerry's love for her was "queer," just as Jerry himself was "queer," and Ivy did not like "queer" things.

When the long-dreaded leave came at last, it took her by surprise. She had not heard from Jerry for a week, and one morning, having run to the pillar-box at the

throws, with some letters for her soldier friends, on her return she met Mr. Sumption, waving his arms and cracking his joints and shouting to her even from beyond earshot, that Jerry was coming home that evening.

"A letter came this morning. Maybe you've got one too?"

Ivy shook her head, and Mr. Sumption tried to disguise his pleasure at being the only one to hear.

"He's a good boy, Jerry—never forgets his father. But he wants to see you though, Ivy. Maybe you'd come and have supper with us this evening?"

"I'm unaccountable sorry, but I'm going up to Senlac town."

"That's a pity. Perhaps you'll come another day?"

"If I've time, Mus' Sumption—but I'm just about vrothered these days wud the harvesters here. Thank you kindly though, all the same."

She had been sidling away as she spoke, and now walked off with a brisk "Good mornun." She was sorry to have to disappoint Mr. Sumption, whom she liked and pitied; but there was no good letting him think she had any use for Jerry.

Before going home she ran down the drive to Little Worge, and told Polly Sinden she was at all costs and risks to come with her to Senlac that evening.

For the rest of the day she was less her cheery, placid self than usual, and the evening in Senlac town was not the treat it might have been. All the time she was haunted by a sense of Jerry's nearness—perhaps he had come as far as Lewes by now, perhaps he was already in Sunday Street, perhaps in Senlac itself. What a fool she had been to tell Mr. Sumption where she was going! Her heart was troubled—another of those "queer" aspects of the situation which she so disliked. Generally when she wanted to get rid of a boy, she did not have feelings like these. All through the soft August twilight,

when she and Polly Sinden, in the clumsy finery of country girls, strolled arm-in-arm up and down the Upper Lake and the Lower Lake—those two lakes of blood which an old, old war had made, giving the town its bloody name—and even afterwards, when having by arts known to themselves acquired two soldiers, they sat in the picture palace with a khaki arm round each tumbled muslin waist, even then the terror lingered, haunting, tearing, elusive as a dead leaf on the wind. Ivy looked nervously into the shadows of the little picture-hall, thinking she saw Jerry's face, angry and swarthy, with eyes like the Forge at night. . . . Suppose he had come after her to Senlac . . . he certainly would if he was home in time. Then came a picture of a girl who was "done in" by her lover. Ivy could stand it no more, and rising to her feet, plunged out over the people's knees.

"That plaace is lik an oven," she said to the Anzac corporal who followed her out. . . . "No, thank you. I'll go home wud Polly."

Polly was a little annoyed that Ivy should have broken up the party so soon; but it certainly was very hot—both the girls' faces were spotted with sweat and their gowns were sticking to their shoulders. Besides, it would be as well not to get too thick with this Australian chap now Bill Putland was writing so regularly. . . . Miss Sinden and Miss Beatup dismissed their escort, and, after the proper number of "Good-by-ees," shouted across longer and longer darkness-muffled distances, they trudged off homewards on the North Trade.

When Ivy reached the farm, she was told that Jerry Sumption had called about eight o'clock—on his way from the station, without even going first to leave his kit-bag at the Horselunges—and that Mrs. Beatup had had an unaccountable to-do to git shut of him.

7

Having made up her mind that a meeting was inevitable, Ivy made no more efforts to avoid one. By her absence on his first visit she had clearly shown Jerry how matters stood, and if he was fool enough to come again . . .

He was, of course. Ivy, unromantically on her knees at her usual business of scrubbing the kitchen boards, felt no annoyance at being so discovered, made no hasty grabs at her rolled-up sleeves, or at the loosening knob of her hair. She would not have done so for a more favoured lover, for none of her courtships had been of the kind that encourages neatness and daintiness in a woman, that leads to curlings and powderings. She knew that men liked her for her youth and health and bigness, for her cheeriness and strength, and as all these things were natural to her she had no need to trouble herself with fakes.

"Hullo, Jerry," she said, without looking up, and sending a swirl of soapy water round his boots.

"Hullo, Ivy. Why weren't you in when I came last night?"

"Because I'd gone into Senlac wud Polly Sinden, as your father ud have told you, if you'd done wot you should ought and gone to him fust."

"You'd no call to go into Senlac—not on the first night of my leave."

"Your leave doan't matter to me."

"Ivy . . ."

He caught her wrist as she was dipping the scrubbing-brush in the bucket, and she was forced to meet his eyes at last. She had tried to avoid this, staring at her soap-suds, for Jerry's eyes were "queer."

"Leave hold of me, Jerry."

"Not till you stand up and look at me. I can't speak to you on all fours like this."

Ivy stood up, rather wondering at Jerry's power to make her do so. He was a small fellow, but not of the stubby build of Tom or Harry Beatup. On the contrary, he was lightly made as a dancing-master, his hands and feet were small but very strong, his face was small and brown, lit by two large sloe-black eyes, with lashes long and curly as a child's. His hair was curly too, in spite of its military cropping. He was a most slovenly-looking soldier, with tunic stained and buttons dim, and puttees looping grotesquely round his slim, graceful legs.

"If the M.P.'s git hold of you . . ." began Ivy jeeringly.

"There ain't any M.P.'s hereabouts. I'm on my leave, and you're starting to spoil it already."

"Wot have I got to do wud your leave? You're maaking some gurt big mistaake, Jerry Sumption."

"Maybe you've forgotten that day at Senlac Fair?"

"And if I have, wot matter? It meant naun. You aun't the fust lad that's kissed me, nor the last, nuther."

It hurt her to have to speak so plainly, but Jerry Sumption must be put right at once on one or two important matters he seemed to have misunderstood. She saw his face go pale under its sunburn and she felt sorry for him. None the less, she stuck to her harshness.

"I likked you well enough, and I lik you still; but if you think as I meant more'n I did or said, you're unaccountable mistaaken."

"Ivy—come out of doors with me. I can't speak to you in here. When my heart's full I want the wind blowing round me."

She shook her head. "No, Jerry; we'll stay where we are, surelye. You're hedge-born, but I'm house-born, and I lik four walls around me when I'm vrothered. Now, lad, doan't that show you as we two cud never mate?"

"So, I'm vrothering you, am I?"

Unaccountable."

"Reckon I didn't vrother you when I clipped you in the lane by the stack of Slivericks."

"Doan't 'ee. . . ."

His strange power over her was coming back. Looking into his eyes she seemed to see strange secrets of woods, memories of roads and stars, and a light that was like the light of a burning wood, such as she had once seen, licking up from the west, burning the little farm and the barns. She was frightened of Jerry, just as she was frightened of Dallington churchyard at night, or that field-corner by Padgham, where strange lights are sometimes seen. Yet it was a fear which instead of making her run, made her stumble and droop towards him, seeking refuge from terror in its source. . . .

He pushed her away.

"Reckon you'll be kissing another lad to-night."

She felt flustered and miserable.

"You're a lamentable trial to me, Jerry."

"Why? 'Cos I've kissed you? It's nothing. I'll be kissing another girl to-night."

"You're a valiant feller."

"Ain't I? You think the world of me, Ivy Beatup."

"Do I? That's news. Now doan't start it all over again. I hear mother coming."

Mrs. Beatup's step creaked outside, and Jerry scowled at the door. The next moment he was astride the window-sill, a queer furtive look in his eyes.

"You aun't going out lik that, surelye! I'm ashamed of you. Stay and spik to mother like a Christian."

But he had swung his leg over, and slid into the yard. She heard him run off, with padding footsteps like a beast.

The next day was Sunday. A thick yellow haze swam over the fields, and there was a faint autumnal scent in

the hedges, mixed of leaves and earth. The grain-fields still smelt of summer, with the baking glumes and the white, cracked ground. Only a few had been cut—the winter sowings at Egypt and Bucksteep; the Volunteer Field and the Street Field at Worge still carried their crops, chaffy and nutty, preyed on by conies. They should have been cut last week, but Mus' Beatup had not been himself on Friday and Saturday, and Juglery had a bad leg, and Harry had gone to Hailsham Fair.

Towards eleven o'clock church and chapel goers began to dribble down the lane to Brownbread Street, while a few strayed into the Bethel, which looked a little less gaunt with its door open to the sunshine and old Grandfather Hubble sitting in it with the collecting-plate on his knees. The congregation was small, but bigger than the Particular Baptist sect in Sunday Street. There were actually only two received members—old Hubble and his daughter-in-law; the rest were either members of other denominations who had quarrelled with their respective chapels, or else felt disinclined for the trudge into Brownbread Street. Bournier came because the minister had once been a blacksmith, and the farmer of Puddledock came because he had once cured a stallion of his that had lockjaw.

Jerry Sumption came because he hoped Ivy Beatup would be there. It was a vain hope, for on fine Sundays the family at Worge always went to church—except, of course, Mus' Beatup, whose scientific readings had taught him the folly of all churches, and Mrs. Beatup, who stayed at home to cook the dinner. However, Mr. Sumption had encouraged, if indeed he had not inspired, the illusion which landed Jerry in one of the big back pews of the Bethel, a pew like a dusty box, smelling of wood-rot. He knew that if he had been more candid Jerry would have padded off over the fields to Brownbread Street and drunk in pernicious heresies of Infant Baptism and Universal Redemption, while he stared at

his sweetheart's profile ruddy in the sunshine which glowed on her through some painted saint. So he concealed the fact that the Beatups were "Church," weather permitting, and allowed Jerry to think he would have Ivy to grin and blink at during the sermon, as on his last visit, when the rain was tinkling in the chapel gutters.

Finding himself sold, Jerry was inclined to sulk. Luckily he did not suspect his father, or he would have got up and walked out. The service was nearly half finished before he gave up hope; that is to say, the sermon had begun, and the congregation had subsided into its various compartments, so that anyone coming in would have seen no one but Mr. Sumption, like a big crow in his Sunday blacks, shouting from the pulpit at two rows of coffin-like pews. Jerry opened the door of his, so that he could look out of the chapel door, which stood open, and see the dull blue sky above the fields of Puddledock, and in the foreground the neglected churchyard of the Bethel, with the tombstones leaning this way and that.

A heavy sickness of heart fell on him, sitting there in the rot-smelling pew, with his arms folded over his chest and his shoulders shrugged to his ears. He felt caught in his love for Ivy Beatup like an animal in a trap, frantic, struggling, wounding himself with his struggles. If she did not want him, why wouldn't she let him go? . . . Lord! he would never forget her that day at Senlac Fair, with her cheeks red as the pimpernel and her eyes like the big twilight stars, and her hair blowing about them as they kissed. . . . If she had not meant it, why had she done it? If she had not wanted his heart, why had she taken it and bruised it so? He did not please her. Why? He had pleased other girls; and now he was in uniform . . . that ought to please her. He remembered how she had made him jealous when she spoke of her soldier friends. Well, now he was a

soldier too—leading a damned life partly for her sake . . . that ought to please her.

In the Bethel yard rank weeds were growing, clumping round the tombstones, thickening the grass with their fat stalks and wide milk-bleeding leaves. They were hot in the sun, and the smell of them crept into the Bethel and found its place in the miasma of wood-rot and Sunday clothes and plaster and stale lamp-oil . . . the smell of pignut stewing in the sun, of the burdock and the thick frog-weed, the plantain, the nettle, the dandelion. The chapel weeds seemed to give Jerry an answer to his question. He did not please Ivy because he was the gipsy-woman's son, no less a weed because he grew in a chapel yard. The hedge-born could not please the house-born, as she had said—though for that matter he had been born in a bed like any Christian, in that little room above the Forge at Bethersden, which he could dimly remember, with its view down three cross-roads.

He clenched his small hard fists, and stared scowling out towards the sun-swamped fields of the horizon. He would punish Ivy Beatup for her cruelty, for having trodden on the chapel weed. He would make her suffer—if he could, for she was tough and lusty as an oak. He found himself hating her for her sturdy cheerfulness—for the shape of her face, with the hard, round cheeks and pointed chin—for her lips which were warm when her heart was cold. . . .

A loud thump on the pulpit woke him out of his thoughts. His father had noticed his abstraction for some time, and chose this way of rousing him. From his vantage he could see into all the separate cells of his congregation, and if he noticed anyone nodding or mooning or reading his Bible for solace, he made haste to recall him to a proper sense of his surroundings. He now stopped in the middle of an eschatological trump and glared at Jerry with his bright, tragic eyes. He had a

habit of drastic personal dealings with his flock, to which, perhaps, its small size was due. Certainly Ades of Cowlease had never entered the Bethel door since Mr. Sumption had "thumped" at him, and one or two others had been driven away in a like manner. To-day everyone, even those whose heads did not pop out of their pews like Jim-Crows, guessed that the minister had "thumped" at Jerry, for the minister's Jerry seldom came through a service without being thumped at—luckily he did not much mind it. "Woa—old 'un," he mumbled to himself, as he met his father's stare, and soon luckily came the hymn: "They shall gather by the river," which Jerry sang most tunefully, in a loud, sweet, not quite human voice, forgetting all those sad thoughts of the chapel weed. . . .

But he remembered them when he was walking across to the Horselunges with his father.

"Father, if I can't get Ivy Beatup, I'll kill myself."

"For shame, you ungodly boy—to speak so light of losing your salvation!"

"Would I lose my salvation if I killed myself?"

"Reckon you would. Satan would get you at once."

"I'll kill her, then. Satan can have her and welcome."

"It's you he'd have if you killed her."

"Then he's got me both ways?"

"Reckon he has, you sinful good-for-nothing, dreaming in sermon-time. Have done, do, with your idle talk, or Satan will get me too, and make me give you a kick behind."

9

Jerry's leave was not a happy or a peaceful one—no more for his father and Ivy Beatup than for himself. Every day he was over at Worge—Ivy had never met anyone so undetachable. She hated herself, too, for some temporary capitulations. Jerry had a way of

making her faint-hearted, so that she would be betrayed into a kiss, or even a visit to the Pictures, with an entwined walk home under the stars. She wished that some other boy—some young Pix or Viner or Kadwell—was home on leave, then she might have escaped to him from Jerry. Not that she really doubted herself—she had made up her mind that she did not want him and that she would not have him ; this still held good, and her momentary lapses deceived neither her nor him. He no longer wooed her ardently—contrariwise, he was stiff and sulky, sullen and rough when he kissed her. He knew that there was no chance for him, that his only prey could be the present moment, which he snatched and despised.

Mr. Sumption, after one or two abortive attempts at persuading Ivy to take his boy, tried to detach Jerry from the vain quest which was spoiling these precious days.

“ There’s many another girl that would have you, Jerry—and a better match, too, for a clergyman’s son.”

“ I know there is—and I’ve had ’em—and thrown ’em away again. She’s the only one I’ve ever wanted for keeps.”

When he heard this, Mr. Sumption felt as if his heart would break.

At last came the end of Jerry’s leave. It was starless dusk, with clouds swagging on the thundery wind. Pools and spills of white light came from the west, making the fields look ghostly in the dripping swale. At Worge a scent of withering corn-stalks came from the fields where the crops had been cut at last, and as Jerry stood in the doorway the first dead leaves of the year fell on his shoulders.

“ Come out with me, Ivy. It’s for the last time, and I hate your kitchen with the ceiling on my head, and your mother spannelling round.”

Ivy was in a good humour. The joy of freedom was

already upon her—she felt confident, and knew that there would be no lapses this evening. So she put a shawl over her head and went out with him. They passed through the yard and the orchard into the grass-fields by Forges Wood.

The field was tangled and soggy, full of coarse, sour grass. In the dip of it, by the wood's edge, toadstools spread dim tents, or squashed invisibly underfoot, as the twilight drank up all colours save white and grey.

"I've trod on a filthy toadstool, and my foot's all over scum," said Ivy, rubbing her shoe in the grass. "Let's git through the hëadge, Jerry, into the dry stubble."

"This is a better place to say good-bye."

"We'll say good-bye in the house. Now, none of your nonsense, Jerry Sumption"—as he put his arm round her waist.

"But it's my last evening."

"Well, I've come for a walk. Wot more d'you want? I'm naun for cuddling, if that's wot you're after. I'll give you a kiss, full and fair, when we say good-bye in the house, but there's to be no lovering under hëadges."

"You've been unkind all along. You've spoilt my leave."

"That's your own fault, surelye. I've bin straight wud you."

He laughed bitterly. Then his laugh broke into a gipsy whine.

"Ivy, are you sure—quite sure you'll never love me?"

"Quite sure—as I've told you a dunnamany times."

"But I don't mean now . . . some day . . . Ivy?"

In the dusk his face showed white as the toadstools at her feet, but she stood firm, for his sake as well as her own.

"It's no use talking about 'some day'—I tell you it's never."

"Never!—and you've let me hold you and kiss you . . ."

"Only now and then—saum as I'd let any nice lad."

His eyes blazed.

"You little bitch!"

"Mind your words, my boy—and leave hoald of my arm, and come into the next field, or I'll git hoame."

But he did not move, and his grip on her arm tightened.

"I want you. I reckon you don't know what that means when I say I want you, or you wouldn't be so damn cruel. Ivy, I can't leave you like this. I can't go back to camp knowing I'm just nothing to you. You must give me some sort of hope. It's not fair to have led me on——"

"I never led you on——"

Her limbs were shaking. An unaccountable terror had seized her—a terror of him, with his hot, gripping hand and blazing eyes, of the field so dim and sour, its grass scummy with the spilth of trampled toadstools, of the wood close by with its spindled ashes and clumping oaks. . . .

"Let me go!" she cried suddenly, in a weak frightened voice.

For answer he pulled her into his arms, and held her with her breast bruised against his.

"I shan't let you go—I'll never let you go. Come into the wood, Ivy. Don't be afraid . . . I love you. . . . Come into the wood—there's nothing to be afraid of. I wouldn't hurt you for worlds."

He tried to pick her up and carry her, but she struggled desperately and broke free.

"This has justabout finished it all, Jerry Sumption. You're a beast—I'll never let you come nigh me agaun. You've a-done for yourself. I've bin good to you and straight wud you, and I'd have gone on being friends; but now I've a-done wud you for good."

Her voice broke with rage, and she turned to run home. But he grabbed her again, and this time she could not escape. He was a small man, and she was a big whacking girl ; but madness was in him, and his arms were like iron clamps.

" You shan't get shut of me like that. I tell you I mean to have you . . . and wot's more I'll make you have me. I'll break your pride—I'll make you want to have me, ask me to take you."

Ivy screamed.

" Scream away. No one ull hear. I've got you, and I'm damned if I let you go till I please. . . . To-morrow you'll be on your knees, begging me to take you and save you."

He clapped his hand over her mouth, and forced back her head, kissing her strained and aching neck till she screamed with pain as well as with fright. Her cries were stilled under his palm, her head swam, her strength was leaving her . . . she was down on one knee . . . then suddenly, she could never remember how, she was free, and running, running as she had never run before, her breath sobbing in her throat—across the field of the toadstools and sour grass, away from the shadow of Forges Wood, into the orchard, to see the gable of Worge rising against the pewter-grey of the clouds that hid the moon.

At the orchard edge she had the sense to stop and tidy herself. There was no longer any fear of pursuit—if indeed she had ever been pursued. She had dropped her shawl in the field, her blouse was torn open at the neck, her hair was down on her shoulders, and her face all blotched with excitement and tears. Also, a new experience, she was trembling from head to foot, and her shaking hands could scarcely fasten her blouse and twist up her hair.

" You beast ! " she sobbed, as she fumbled ; " you beast ! You dirty gipsy ! "

Then an unaccountable longing seized her for her mother—she longed to throw her arms round her mother's neck and cry upon her shoulder. With a little plaintive moan she started off again for the house, but by the time she reached the doorstep the craving had passed.

10

For half an hour after Ivy left him, Jerry lay on his face in Forges Wood, motionless save every now and then for a quiver of his shoulders. Over him the boughs of the ash-trees cracked and sighed, under him the trodden leaves rustled creepingly. He felt them cold and moist against his cheek, with the clammy mould of nettles, weeds that were trampled and dead. His heart in him was dead—cold, heavy and sodden as a piece of rain-soaked earth. The fire in him was out—it had driven him mad and died. By his short madness, scarcely five minutes long, he had lost Ivy for ever. She was gone as the summer was gone from the woods, but, unlike the summer, she would never come back. A sour, eternal autumn lay before him, sour as the grass and toadstools of Forges Field, eternal as the blind, creeping force from which toadstools are spawned into fields and poor men's hearts.

At last he rose to his feet, and stumbled off, plunging into the thickets of Forges Wood, through the ash-plats and the oak-scrub. Scarcely realising what he was doing, he forced his way out of the wood, through its hedge of brambled wattles, into the lane. The pewterish sky hung low over the hedges, and in its dull glimmer he could see the road under his feet. He soon clambered out of the lane, pushing through the hedge into the fields of Padgham. To eastward lay the thick, black woods of Furnacefield, and the cry of an owl came out of them, plaintively.

Jerry wandered in the fields till dawn, his heart cold and heavy as a clod, though now and then little crawls of misery went into it, like a live thing creeping into the earth. He had lost Ivy for ever . . . his own madness—which was gone—had taken her from him . . . she was gone, as the summer was gone from the woods. . . .

He came nearly as far south as Hazard's Green, but mostly roamed in his own tracks, prowling the barns of Burntkitchen. Then, when a thin, greenish light shone like mould on the pewtered sky, a sudden childish craving came to him, the same that had come to Ivy in the orchard. As she had wanted her mother in her fright and misery, so he wanted his father, and ran home.

II

A light was burning at the Horselunges, but the cold lamp of dawn shone on Jerry as he stood fumbling in the doorway, then, finding the door unlocked, crept in. A footstep creaked in his father's room, and the next minute the door was flung open and the minister stood at the top of the stairs, blocked against the light, looming, monstrous, like a huge black Satan.

"Where've you been?"

"In the woods."

Jerry's teeth were chattering as his father took him by the arm and pulled him into the room. A fire was burning on the hearth, with the old, old cat purring squeakily before it, while the broken-winged thrush, which Mr. Sumption had forgotten to cover up for the night, hopped to and fro, twittering its best effort at a song.

"Oh, may the Lord forgive you, you scamp," groaned the minister, as Jerry fell crumpled on the sofa. His boots and uniform were caked with leaf-mould and clay, his hair was full of leaves and mud and his face was streaked with dirty wet.

"Are you hungry?"

"No."

There was a pot of something on the fire, but it was just as well that Jerry was not hungry, for it had been burnt to a cinder long ago.

"I've been sitting up for you all night," said Mr. Sumption. "When you didn't come in, I went over to Worge, and Ivy said you'd been out with her, but had gone off by yourself, she didn't know where. She's a kind girl, and told me not to worry."

"Father—I've lost her for ever."

It was the first time he had said the words aloud, and their wretchedness swept over him, breaking his spirit, so that he began to cry.

"I've lost her . . . I was mad . . . and she's gone."

Mr. Sumption stood staring at the small, slight figure on the sofa, lying with its dirty face turned away, its back showing him the split tunic of a soldier of the King. His bowels yearned towards the son of the woman from Ithornden, and his rage switched violently from Jerry to the cause of his grief.

"Drat the girl! Drat the slut! What is she after, despising her betters? She's led you on—she's played with you. Don't trouble about her, Jerry, my boy. She isn't worth it."

"I love her," gasped Jerry—"and I've lost her. It's my own fault. I went mad. I frightened her. . . . Father, I'm a beast—I reckon Satan's got me."

Mr. Sumption patted his shoulder.

"I reckon Satan's got me," moaned the boy—"or why did I go wild like that?"

"Satan can't hurt the elect."

"What's that to me? I reckon I'm none of your elect. I'm just a poor boy who's done for himself."

Mr. Sumption dropped on his knees beside him, and began to pray.

"O Lord, Thou hast given me a sore trial in this son of mine, and now terrible doubts are in my soul as to whether he is one of the elect for whom Jesus died. O Lord, he's my flesh and bone, and the flesh and bone of my dear wife who's dead, and yet it looks as if Satan had got him. O Lord, save my son from the lion and my darling from the power of the dog, from the dreadful day that shall burn like an oven, and the furnace of pitch and tow. . . ."

"Father, have done, do—you give me the creeps."

"I'm praying for your soul, ungrateful child."

"Let my soul be—I'm tired to death."

Indeed a grey shade of utter weariness had crept into his skin, so that his face looked ghastly in the morning twilight fighting round the lamp. Mr. Sumption, who had stood up, knelt down again, and took off Jerry's boots.

"Have a sleep then, my laddie—there on the sofy. It's scarce worth going to bed. Besides, you'd have to clean yourself first."

"You won't leave me, father—you'll stay along of me?"

"I'll stay along of you and pray quiet."

Jerry gave a grunt, and drew up his knees to his chin, like some animal rolling itself for sleep. Mr. Sumption knelt beside him and continued his prayer:

"O Lord, Thou hast a son, and doesn't Thou know what I feel about this wretched boy of mine? Lord, give me a token that he is not predestined to everlasting death; save him from the snares of hell, in which he seems tangled like a bird in the snare of the fowler . . ."

"Oh, father, do pray cheerful," groaned Jerry.

But praying cheerful was quite beyond the poor father's powers, never remarkable in this direction at the best of times. All he could do was to sing, "Let Christian faith and hope dispel The fears of guilt and woe," till Jerry had fallen asleep.

Three hours later he woke, to find Mrs. Hubble's big wooden washtub in front of the fire.

"Up you get," said the Reverend Mr. Sumption, "and into that bath, and I'll take your clothes down to be cleaned and mended before you go to the station."

"I'm not going to the station."

"You're going there two hours from now, or you won't be in Waterheel to-night."

"I don't want to be in Waterheel ever again."

But Mr. Sumption was not having any nonsense. A large hairy paw like a gorilla's shot out and swung Jerry by the collar on to the floor. "Now strip, you ungodly good-for-nothing, and I'll send you out looking like a clergyman's son."

Jerry, groaning and moaning to himself, got into the bath, while Mr. Sumption took his dirty bundle of clothes down to Mrs. Hubble's kitchen, where a long and noisy argument followed on her abilities to make bricks without straw, as she called his request to make his son look decent. He returned to the study to find Jerry less stiff in the joints, but growing every minute more defiant and miserable as the steaming water cleared the fogs of sleep from his brain.

"I'm not going back to camp. I'd die if I was to go there—with Ivy lost. It was bad enough when I had her to think of and all—— But now . . . I'd justabout break my heart."

"Maybe after a time you can write to her again——"

"I can't, I tell you. You don't understand. I've lost her for ever. I frightened her—I made her scream."

"You're a beast," said his father.

"Reckon I am, and reckon you're treating me like one."

"If you stay behind, they'll nab you for an absentee."

"I don't care if they do. I'd sooner be locked up, than a soldier any more."

"For shame, boy!"

"Well, how'd you like to be a soldier?—sworn at all day by bloody sergeants, and always fatigue and C.B. I'm fed up, I tell you, and I'm not going back."

"You'll go back, if I have to pull you all the way by the ears."

"You're the cruellest father I ever heard of."

Mr. Sumption lost his temper, and cuffed Jerry's head as he sat in the tub. Luckily the boy's defiance had been only the false flare of damp spirits, and instead of receiving the blow with an explosion of anger, he was merely cowed by it. Whereat Mr. Sumption's heart melted, and he saw the piteousness of this poor little soldier, whose heart was black with some evil beyond his help.

The rest of the time passed amicably, till Mrs. Hubble, with many contemptuous sniffs, brought up Jerry's uniform brushed and mended, and after he was dressed he did not look so bad, especially as the bath had had the humiliating result of making his skin look several shades lighter.

Breakfast followed, and afterwards he and his father set out for Senlac Station, taking the longer North Road by Woods Corner and Darwell Hole, instead of that shorter, more dangerous, way past the gate of Worge. It was a morning of clear, golden distances, with pillars and towers and arches of cloud moving solemnly before the wind across a borage-blue sky. Drops of dew fell from the trees on the backs of the two men, and the air was full of the smell of earth and wet leaves, and that faint mocking smell of spring which sometimes comes in autumn.

As they tramped along the North Road, away from the Obelisk by Lobden's House, which allows a Dallington man to see his village for miles after he has left it, Mr. Sumption spoke very patiently and kindly to his son.

"Keep good and straight," he said, "for you're a good woman's son, and some day you'll find a woman

whom you'll love as I loved your mother. May she be to you all that your mother was to me, and may you keep her longer. But don't go running after strange women, or think to forget love in wantonness. One day, if you trust the Lord, you'll meet a girl that has been worth keeping good for, that you'll find lovelier than Ivy Beatup, and ull think herself honoured to marry a clergyman's son."

"Clergyman's son . . ." murmured Jerry, in tones that made Mr. Sumption swoop round on him with uplifted hand, to see a look on his face that made him thrust it back into his pocket.

His eyes were still full of his mysterious trouble, but he did not speak of it so much. He just plodded on beside his father like a calf to slaughter, and at last they came to Senlac Town, with the houses like barley-stacks in the sunshine. They were early, and had half an hour to wait at the station. A train had just come in, and as they crossed the bridge they suddenly met Tom Beatup.

"Tom!" cried the minister, cracking his joints with delight. "Who'd have thought to meet you! I'd no idea you were coming home."

"Nor had I till yesterday—seven days' leave before I go to France. I sent off a telegram, but I reckon it was too late for them to get it last night. Hullo, Jerry! Enjoyed yourself?"

"Unaccountable," said Jerry with a leer.

"Wait for me, Tom," said Mr. Sumption, "and we'll walk home together. I shan't be more than twenty minutes or so."

"I'm justabout sorry, but I must git off this wunst. Reckon I'll see you again soon."

"Come round to the Horselunges one evening."

"I will, surelye"—and Tom was off, whistling "Sussex by the Sea."

It seemed to Mr. Sumption that he looked a bigger, older man than the Tom Beatup of five months ago.

He seemed to have grown and filled out, he had lost his yokel shuffle, and his uniform was smart and neat. The minister glanced down at Jerry, who stood beside him, small, untidy, cowed and furtive. Jerry undoubtedly did not look his best in uniform—it seemed to exaggerate the worst of those gipsy characteristics which he had inherited from the Rossarmescroes or Hearnns. Now, in civvies he used not to look so bad—he was a well-made, graceful little chap. . . .

“Jerry,” said Mr. Sumption, “why can’t you look like Tom Beatup?”

“I reckon it’s because I’m Jerry Sumption—the clergyman’s son.”

And again there was that look on his face which prevented retaliation.

13

In old days it used to take Tom a good couple of hours to walk from Senlac to Sunday Street—but then, he had generally been behind a drove of lazy tups or heifers, or silly scattering sheep. To-day he swung smartly along, scarcely feeling the weight of his kit-bag, whistling as he walked. It was good to feel the soft thick fanning of the Sussex air, so different from the keen Derbyshire wind, with its smell of bilberries and slaty earth; to see the old places along the North Trade—Whitelands, Park Gate, Burntkitchen, and then, when he came to the throws, that wide sudden view of the country bounded by the Four Roads, swamped in hazy sunshine, with the trickle of lanes and the twist of the rough, blotched hedges, and the pale patches of the stubble, and the low clouds sailing over it from Cross-in-Hand. He walked through Brownbread Street, empty save for the waggon-team that drowsed outside the George, silent save for the hum of children’s voices in the school. Then he came to Pont’s Green, where the lane to Sunday

Street meets the East Road. The hops were being picked in the low sheltered fields by Slivericks Wood, and the smoke of the drying furnace streamed out of the cowl of the oasthouse at the throws, while all the air seemed heavy with the sweet, sleepy scent of stripping bines.

He had meant, traitorously, to call at the shop before he went home ; but just as he came to the willow-pond, a small dusty figure ran out of the hedge, and seized him round the waist.

"Hullo, Tom ! "

"Hullo, Zacky ! Wot are you doing here ? "

"I haven't bin to school—I couldn't go when I heard you wur coming. Mother got your telegram this mornun, and she wur sure it wur to say as you wur killed."

"Was she pleased when she found it wasn't ? "

"Unaccountable. But she'd nigh cried her eyes out first, and told Ivy and Nell as something tarr'ble had happened to you, afore they found as she'd never opened the telegram."

"I'll write a letter next time," said Tom ; "but I never knew for sure till yesterday that I'd be gitting leave so soon."

He did not scold Zacky for having stayed away from school. It was a relief not to have to exercise quasi-paternal authority any more, but just to take the truant's hand and walk with him to Worge Gate—where Mus' Beatup was standing with his gun, having seen Tom in the distance from Podder's Field, where the conies are, while Mrs. Beatup was running down the drive from the house, her apron blowing before her like a sail.

"Here you are, my boy," said Mus' Beatup sententiously, clapping him on the shoulder. "Come to see how we're gitting on now you've left us. The oald farm's standing yit—the oald farm's standing yit."

"And looks valiant," said Tom, grinning, and kissing his mother.

"Not so valiant as it ud look if there wurn't no war on."

"Maybe—that cud be said of most of us."

"Not of you, Tom," said Mrs. Beatup. "I never saw you look praaperer than to-day."

"Oh, I'm in splendid heart—eat till I'm fit to bust."

"You wear your cap like Bill Putland," said Zacky. "It maakes you look different-like."

Tom's cap indeed had a rackish tilt over one ear, though he did not profess to imitate Bill Putland's jauntiness.

"Maybe old Bill ull git a bit of leave in a week or two. I see Jerry Sumption's gone back to-day. I met him and minister at the station."

Mrs. Beatup gave a snort.

"And unaccountable glad I am to see the last of Gipsy Jerry; he's justabout plagued Ivy to death all the time he's bin here. She says she's shut of him, and I hope to goodness she means it."

"Jerry shud never have gone fur a soldier," said Tom. "He's got no praaper ideas of things, and is fur ever gitting in trouble. Come, mother, let's be walking up to the house and put my bag in the bedroom."

"Wot's in your bag?" asked Zacky.

"Soap, razor, slacks, and one or two liddle bits of things," said Tom, grinning down at him in proud consciousness of two pounds of Derby rock—to such magnificence had his sweetmeat buying risen from his old penn'orths of bull's-eyes.

They walked up to the house, and greetings came with Ivy hanging out the clothes, and Harry toiling over the corn accounts in shamefaced arrears. Then his bag was unpacked, and presents given to everybody—sweetstuff to Zacky and Harry, a good knife to his father, and to his mother a wonderful handkerchief case with the arms of the Royal Sussex worked in lurid silks; there was a needlebook of the same sort for Nell, when she should

come home from school; and for Ivy there was a mother-o'-pearl brooch, and, which she liked even better, messages from a dozen Sussex chaps at Waterheel.

Then as the family went back to its business, Tom, who for the first time in his life had none, slipped out of the house, and jogged quietly down the drive towards the village. There would be just time before dinner to call at the Shop.

The blind was down, for the sunshine was streaming in at the little leaded window, threatening the perils of dissolution to the sugar mice (made before the sugar scarcity, indeed, it must be confessed, before the War) and of fermentation to the tinned crab. Tom's hand may have shaken a little as he pulled down the latch, but except for that his manner was stout, very different from his sheepish entrances of months ago.

Buzz . . . ting . . . Thyrsa looked up from the packing-case she was breaking open behind the counter. The next moment she gave a little cry. She had just been thinking of Tom at Waterheel, wondering if it was his dinner-time yet, and what Cookie had put in the stew; and then she had lifted her eyes to see his broad, sun-burnt face smiling at her from the door, with his hair curling under his khaki cap, and his sturdy figure looking at once stronger and slimmer in its uniform.

"Tom!" she gasped, and held out her hand across the counter—hoping . . .

But he had gone beyond the timid daring of those days. Before she knew what was happening, he had marched boldly round behind the counter and taken her in his arms.

Tom's family gave a poor reception to his news that this was "last leave" before going to France.

"I knew as that there telegram meant something

tar'ble," wailed Mrs. Beatup. "It wurn't fur naun I cried, Nell, though you did despise me."

"I didn't despise you," said Nell; "you re very unjust, mother."

"Unjust, am I?—wud my boy going out to be slaughtered like a pig."

"I aun't going to be slaughtered, mother—not if I know it. It's I who'll do the slaughtering."

"You who'd go swummy at wringing a cockerel's neck. . . . Reckon a German ull taake some killing—want more'n a twist and a pull."

"He'll want no more'n I've got to give him. Now, doan't you taake on so, mother—there's naun to vrother about. Maybe I woan't be off so soon after all—it's only an idea that's going round. And if I do go, I aun't afeard. I've a feeling as no harm ull come to me."

"And I've a feeling as it will. Howsumdever . . . I mun think as I've got four children left . . . and a hoame . . . and a husband"—remembering her blessings one by one.

Mus' Beatup was inclined to be contemptuous.

"Wot fur are they sending you out now? You've bin training scarce five month."

"Many of the boys git less."

"Maybe they do, wud Government being wot it is. As if anyone wud know cudn't see as it taakes ten year to maake a looker."

"Reckon things have to go quicker in the army than on a farm. If we all took ten years to git ready, the Bosches ud have us middling soon."

"They'd taake ten years, too, and it ud all go much better."

"At that raate we'd never have done, surelye."

"And wot maakes you think as we'll ever have done, as things are? . . . Go forrard five mile in a year, and it'll be two hundred years afore we git to the Kayser's royal palace. You see 'em all fighting around a farm

as it wur the Tower of Lunnon—their objective, they call it. If Worge wur an objective it ud taake the Germans fifteen month to git into it, and we'd taake another fifteen month to git 'em out ; and then they'd git in agaun, and it ud go on lik that till the plaace wur in shards. I tell you this aun't a hurrying sort of war, and ull be won by them wot lives longest."

Tom was impressed. "Seemingly you know more about it than I do."

"I read the paapers, and reckon I do a bit of thinking as well."

"Reckon you do. Howsumdever, it's my plaace to fight and not to think—I leave that to men lik you."

In spite of his respect for Mus' Beatup as a military tactician, he was a bit disgusted with him as a farmer. A searching of the farm accounts and an examination of the shame-faced Harry revealed a state of affairs even more depressing than he had looked for. The harvest had been mismanaged, the oats having been allowed to stand too long, and a quantity of seed had been lost. The blight had got into the hops owing to insufficient spraying, and two sheep had died of bronchitis. Tom was at first inclined to be angry. Harry acknowledged having played truant on one or two important occasions, though he insisted, whiningly, that he had worked "lik ten black slaves" for most of the summer. If he had always been on the spot, the aberrations of Mus' Beatup and the laziness and pigheadedness of Elphick and Juglery might have been counteracted to a certain degree. Tom would have liked to have beaten Harry, just to teach him the disadvantages of ratting in harvest-time, but he was now oddly loath to exercise the old compulsory tyrannies. He saw, too, the pathos of Harry's youth, forced to play watchdog to middle-aged vice and ancient inefficiency.

So, instead of being angry, he was just patient. He went out a good deal during his leave, and the family

whispered, "Thyrza Honey"; but in the afternoons and soft evenings, when all the fields were rusty in the harvest moon, he would walk with Harry over the farm, and point out to him the work that would have soon to be done in the way of sowings and diggings, with never a word of reproach for the pitiable deeds of the summer.

"It aun't too late to try fur a catch crop or two—harrow some clover on the Volunteer stubble, and if you sow early and late red, and late white, you'll git cuttings right on into June. I wudn't have potato oats agaun fur the Street field—their rootses git too thick fur clays, and they shed seed unaccountable if you leave them standing a day over their due. Try Sandy oat this fall—and Flemish oat is good in clays, I've heard tell. And the two-acre shud go into potash next year—wurzels or swedes, or maybe potatoes."

"I'll never kip all this in my head, Tom."

"You'll justabout have to, sonny. I tell you this farm's your job, saum as mine's soldiering. I'm going to fight fur Worge, and you've got to back me up and see as Worge is kept going fur me to fight fur."

"I'll do my best, surely—but you must write, Tom, and maake me mind it all. Write and say, 'This week you must drill the two-acre'—or 'To-morrow's the day to start thinning,' or 'Maake a strong furrer this frost,' so's I shan't disremember the lot."

"I'll send you a postcard at whiles, to kip you up to it; but I shan't be here to see how things are going, so you'll have to trust to your own gumption. And doan't go agaunst faather when he's sober, fur he's a clever chap and knows wot he's doing; but when he's tight doan't let him meddle, for he's unaccountable contrary and ud pot a harvest just to spite the Government. As fur Juglery and Elphick, they've got no more sense nor roots, so doan't you ever be asking wot to do of them."

Harry was impressed by all this counsel. But perhaps its real weight lay in Tom's new glamour, his khaki

uniform, his occasional jauntiness, his military slang and tales of camp life. He had always been fond of his brother and liked him for a good fellow; but now he went a step further, and admired him. There was something about this quiet, neat, efficient young soldier, which had been lacking in good-natured old Tom, with his dirty skin and sloppy corduroys. Without quite understanding what it was, or how it had come there, Harry was both sensible and envious of it. He felt that he would like to be a soldier too, wear khaki, carry mysterious tools, and have before him a dim, glorious adventure called France. But since these things were not to be, a kind of rudimentary hero-worship led him to make plans for "carrying on" at home. He would not disappoint this soldier brother, who had exalted his work on the farm by speaking of it as part of the adventure on which he was so much more glamorously engaged. He had never seen it in that light before—for that matter, neither had Tom. But now he would try to do his share—back Tom up, as he had said. Harry's nature was more ardent than his brother's, more romantic in its clay-thickened way, and on this ardour and romance Tom had unconsciously built. There was now a chance of his memory calling louder than Senlac Fair or the wood by Cade Street.

15

Tom did not tell his family about Thyrza Honey till the morning he left Sunday Street. He knew they were curious, but he felt that he would rather face their curiosity than their comments. They were sure to be pleased at the news from a material standpoint, but against that he had to balance the fact that the women—except, perhaps, Ivy—did not like Thyrza, and that his mother still looked upon him as a little boy, too young to

think of marrying. He had looked upon himself in that light six months ago—it was queer how much older he felt now. Surely it did not make you all that much older to have the sergeant howling at you, or to sleep with fifty men in a hut, or to eat stew out of a dixey. . . . Yet, the fact remained, that in April he had felt a boy and in September he felt a man ; and, more—he was a man ; for Thyrza had accepted him as her lover, and had promised to let him fulfil his manhood as her husband.

At present he was content with the first stage. Each day held a new wonder. Yet he did nothing more wonderful than sit with her in the little room behind the shop—the sanctuary into which he had so often peeped in the old days, wondering what Thyrza thought and did there in the humming firelight, with her kettle and her cat and her account-books in which all the little traffic of the shop was entered with sucked pencil and puckered brows.

He would sit by her and hold her hand, so large and soft and firm, turning it over and over in his own, kissing it back and palm. Her manner was a little motherly, for she was touched by the fact that she was the first woman he had ever held or kissed, while her own experience was deep and bitter. She was older than he was too, and, as she thought, sharper at the uptake, though certainly he had improved in this of late. She would hold him in her arms, with his head against her breast, held between her heart and her elbow, as she had for a few short minutes held the little baby who died. . . . She never asked herself why she loved him so much better than the big, strong, hairy Bournier, or than Hearsfield, whose hands were white as a gentleman's ; all she knew was that she loved him, and that she pitied him for the fond no-reason that he loved her and through her was learning his first lessons in woman and love.

Then before he went home she would make him tea, or supper perhaps, and herself gain new sweet experience

in ministering to the material wants of the man whose spirit she held. No meal prepared for Honey had been like this, and they would sit over it cosily together, all the more conscious of their union when the little buzzing bell of the shop divided them, and Tom, new privileged, would sit in the back room listening to Thyrza serving Putlands or Sindens or Bourners or Hubbles, and getting rid of them as quickly as she could—which, it must be confessed, was not very quick, for she was far too soft and kind to turn anyone out who seemed to want to stay. Then the bell which had divided them would bring them together again as it rang behind the departing shopper, and Thyrza would come back to the lover waiting for her in the red twilight beside the singing fire.

They did not go out together till the last evening. Then he came to tea and stayed to supper, and in the interval they went into the lane just as the dusk came stealing up the sky. Thyrza had objected at first.

"We closed early yesterday, and folk ull be vexed if they find us shut this evenun too."

"Folk be hemmed! This is my last evenun, and I'm going to taake you where we can't hear that tedious liddle bell of yourn."

"Doan't miscall my bell, fur it rings when you come to see me. In the old days when it rang, I used to say to myself, 'Is that Tom?' and look through the winder, hoping . . ."

"Thyrza, did you love me then?"

"Reckon I did. But I doan't know as I ever thought much about it, fur I maade sure as at the raate you wur going it ud be a dunnamany years afore you started courting praaperly."

"I'm glad I didn't wait, surelye. Oh, liddle creature, you can't know wot this week's bin to me. I'll go out to France feeling . . . feeling . . . I can't tell you wot I feel, but it's as if I wur leaving part of myself behind, and that the part I left behind wur helping and backing

up the part out there . . . it sounds unaccountable silly when I say it, but it's wot I've got in my heart."

They were in the big pasture meadow near Little Worge, sitting by the willow-pond which lay cupped against the lane. It was the first and the last landmark in Sunday Street—the thick scummed water with the grey trees dipping their leaves in its stillness. To-day a soft wind rustled in them, blowing from the west, and scarcely louder than the wind throbbed the distant guns, the beating of that racked far-off heart whose terrible secrets Tom was soon to know. Thyrza shuffled against his side as they sat on the grass.

"Oh, Tom—hear the guns? It's tar'ble to think of you out there."

"I'll come back, surelye."

"Do you feel as if you will?"

"Surelye—since I've left half myself behind."

Her arms stole round him, and the beating of that far-away heart was drowned in the beating of his under her cheek.

A pale cowslip light was in the sky, creeping over the fields, putting yellower tints into Thyrza's butter skin and a web of gold over her ashen hair. Gradually it seemed to flower in the dusk till all the field was lit up . . . the mounds and molehills with hollows scooped darkly against the light, the pond like thick yellow glass, the willows like drooping flame. The picture became graven on Tom's heart—the grey sky blooming with light and shedding it down on the field of the mounds and molehills, the pond, the willows, and the woman drowsing in his arms—so that when later in France he thought of England, he thought of it only as that willow-pond at the opening of Sunday Street, and Thyrza Honey lying heavy and warm and sweet against his breast.

"Hold me close, Tom, dearie—hold me close, so's I doan't hear the war. Aun't it queer how our hearts beat louder than the guns! . . ."

PART III

THYRZA

I

THAT autumn and winter there was a lot of talk in the papers about food. Wedged into news of the Ancre and Beaumont Hamel, the crumpling-up of Roumania under von Mackensen, and President Wilson's Peace Note, came paragraphs and letters and articles on food and the ways of economising and producing it. The latter most troubled Harry, as he thought of the modest spring-sowings of Worge. If it was indeed true that the German U-boats were threatening the country's wheat supply, might it not be as well to reclaim the old tillage of the Sunk Field or even break up grassland in the high meadows by Bucksteep?

Harry did not often read the papers, getting all his news from the *Daily Express* poster which Mrs. Honey displayed outside the shop when the papers arrived at noon; but when paper-restrictions brought posters to an end, he went skimming through Mus' Beatup's *Sussex News*, and one day skimming was changed to plodding by a very solid article on wheat-production and the present needs.

In many ways it was a revelation to Harry. Though he had been a farm-boy all his life it had never struck him till then that grain-growing was of any importance to the nation, or imagined that the Worge harvests mattered outside Worge. The fields, the stock had been to him all so many means of livelihood, and the only motive of himself and his fellow-workers the negative

one of keeping Worge from the auctioneer's. If he ever realised his part in the great adventure, it was only when he saw his duty to keep the place together for Tom to fight for. This was his newest and highest motive, and when he refused the call of distant woods, broke with the Brownbread rat-and-sparrow club, and paid no more than a business visit to Senlac Fair, it was so that Tom's sacrifice should not be in vain. But here was a chap making out that a farmer was very nearly as important as a soldier, and that it was on the wheat-fields of England as well as on the battlefields of France that the war would be won. . . .

After this, Harry always read the food-supply news, and pondered it. Was it indeed true that the war which was being waged with such gallantry and fortitude abroad might be lost at home? For the first time he had a personal interest in the struggle, apart from the interest he felt through Tom. Hitherto the war had meant nothing to him, because he had thought he meant nothing to the war—he was too young to be a soldier, probably always would be, since everyone said that peace would come next year. All he had had of warfare was the distant throb and grumble of guns a hundred miles away—not even a prowling Taube or lost Zeppelin had visited the country within the Four Roads. First the lighting order, then the liquor control, then the Conscription Act—only thus and indirectly had the war touched him, requiring of him merely a passive part. But now he saw that he also might take his active share, and the realisation set fire to his clay.

The winter was a bad one—bitterly cold, with thick green ice on the ponds, and a skimming of hard snow on the fields, where the soil was like iron. The marshes of Horse Eye were sheeted with a frozen overflow, and the wind that rasped and whiffled from the east, stung the skin like wire, and piercing the cracks of barns, made the stalled cattle shiver and stamp. There was

little work on the farm, though Harry had done his best to fulfil Tom's injunctions, and had carted his manure and turned a strong furrow to the frost. The lambing had been got through somehow—but two ewes and three or four lambs had died, as they would never have done if Tom had been there. At every turn Harry was faced by his own inexperience, and learned only at the price of many disappointments and much humiliation.

But he was the type which failure only makes dogged, and his unsuccessful winter helped his new sense of the country's need in making him plan daringly for the spring. He resolved that his apprenticeship should not last beyond the winter—it was his own fault that it had lasted so long—and in March he would get to business, and start his scheme for doubling the grain acreage of the farm.

There were several acres of old tillage to be reclaimed, and Harry was young and daring and amateurish enough to contemplate also breaking up grass-land. He would of course have to consult his father first. Mus' Beatup had spent a sorry winter, "kipping the coald out" at the Rifle Volunteer. The slackness of farm work, the cold and discomfort of the weather, the growing unpalatableness of his meals, all combined for worse results than usual, and by the time of the keen wintry spring there was no denying that a good slice of both his physical and mental vigour had been eaten away. However, he was still the nominal head of the farm, and must be consulted—Tom would have had it so. Unfortunately, Harry chose the wrong day. Mus' Beatup was sober, but suffering from an internal chill as a result of having lain for an hour in the frozen slush a couple of nights ago, before Nimrod the watch-dog found him and brought Harry out with his frantic barks. To-day he sat by the fire, shuddering and muttering to himself, drinking a cup of hot cocoa and swearing at his wife because there was no sugar in it.

"I can't git none," wailed Mrs. Beatup. "I tried at the shop, and Nell tried in Brownbread Street, and Ivy's tried in Dallington, and Harry asked when he wur over at Senlac market. . . ."

"And have you tried Rushlake Green and Punnetts Town and Three Cups Corner and Heathfield and Hellinglye and Hailsham? You try a bit further afore you dare to give me this stuff."

"But there aun't none in the whole country—so I've heard tell."

"Maybe. Reckon Govunmunt's got it all, saum as they've got all the beer and the spirits. They've got pounds and pounds of it, those there Cabinick Ministers, and eat it for breakfast and dinner and tea. I tell you I'm dog-sick of this war, and I'm hemmed if I move another step to help a Govunmunt as taakes fust our beer and then our boys, and then our sugar"—and Mus' Beatup spat dramatically into the fire, as if it were Whitehall.

The moment was not propitious, but Harry had to consider the weather, which showed possibilities that must be made use of at once. Mus' Beatup listened wearily to his suggestions.

"Oh, it's more wheat as they want, is it? They're going to take that next. . . . Reclaim the oald tillage? Wot did we let it go fallow fur, if it wurn't cos it didn't pay the labour? . . . Break up the grass-land? You'll be asking to plough the kitchen floor next."

"If we doan't do summat, I reckon we'll be maade to."

"Reckon we will—saum as we wur maade to give up Tom. And they say this country's fighting Prussian tyranny."

"Well, faather, if we doan't grow more corn we'll lose the war. I wur reading in the paapers as all our corn and wheat used to come from furrin parts, but now, wud ships wanted to carry soldiers and them hemmed U-boats spannelling around. . . ."

"You talk lik the *Sussex News*. Wot d'you want to go vrothering about them things fur? You do your work and doan't go roving."

"Faather, I aun't bin roving all this winter."

"No, you aun't—that's a good lad, fur sartain sure."

"And if you let me do this job, I promise I'll stick to it and pull it through."

"You might as well chuck your money into the pond as spend it on grain-growing nowadays."

"Not wud all these new arrangements the Govun-munt's maade . . . guaranteed prices and all. Oh, faather, let me try as I said. I want to do my bit saum as Tom."

"Seemingly your bit's to land Worge at the auctioneer's. Howsumdever, do wot you lik—I'm ill and helpless and oald. I can't stop you. Now adone do wud all this vrotherification of a poor sick man, and ask mother to let me have a spoonful of syrup in this nasty muck."

2

So on Harry, sixteen years old, with little or no experience, and a bad character to live down, fell the task of bringing Worge into line with a national endeavour. It was strange how his earthy imagination had taken fire at the new idea, and a curious justification of the Press. A sense of patriotism had wakened in him, as it had not wakened in Tom after nearly a twelvemonth's service. Tom was no longer indifferent or unwilling, but his enthusiasm scarcely went beyond the regiment—the feeling of "*Sussex chaps*"—the idea of fighting for Worge, or, at the most abstract, "having a whack at Kayser Bill."

He had been in France about three months now. He had not been sent over as soon as he expected, but in

November there had been a big draft from the 18th Sussex, including Tom and Jerry and Bill, also Mus' Archie—Mus' Dixon, who had been badly gassed on the Somme, stayed behind in charge of "School," and rumour said that he would not be sent out again. So far Tom seemed to have had a far duller time abroad than in England ; he had not so much as seen a German, and his letters home were chiefly about mud. The family jealously hinted that his letters to Thyrza Honey were more entertaining. However, he kept his promise to Harry, and sent him councillor postcards now and again. The last had consisted of just one word—"spuds !"

That was the spring when potatoes were being sold at sixpence a pound in Eastbourne and Hastings, and such inducements were held out to growers, that instead of the usual modest half-acre, Harry intended to make potatoes part of his new scheme. The two-acre was in potash this year, also the home field, and Harry decided to break up the pasture-land next the orchard. Some of the space would have to be used for roots—swedes and wurzels—but there would be a spud-growing such as Worge had never seen in its history.

Then there was the more ticklish problem of the grain, and what kinds to sow. Harry took Tom's advice and decided on Sandy oats for the Street field and the field next the Volunteer. In the home field he would grow awned wheat—and red spring wheat on the reclaimed tillage of the Sunk Field.

Then came the problem of which grass-lands to break up. If only Tom had been there to advise him ! He dare not ask his father, in case he should withdraw his first permission. Breaking up grass-land is heresy to an orthodox farmer, and it was quite possible that Mus' Beatup would change his mind when it came to the crisis. For this reason Harry said no more about it, and planned craftily to start work on one of his father's

“bad days,” when he would not be likely to interfere. Left without counsel, he decided to break up the rest of the Sunk Field, also Forges Field, and an old pasture at the Bucksteep end of the farm. These were wretched soils and would have to be heavily manured ; but none of the soils round Worge was really good, and some decent grass must be left for the cows and ewes. Manures were scarce and dear, owing to the war, but Harry thought he could make shift with the farmyard dung, supplemented by a little night-soil, and a ton of waste from the gypsum mines near Robertsbridge.

All this cost him more thinking than he had ever done in his life. Once or twice he lay awake from bed-time till dawn, adding up figures, working out ways and means, and making plans for settling any opposition, drunk or sober, from Mus’ Beatup. His responsibility was enormous, but he was at bottom too simple-minded to feel the full weight of it, and his enthusiasm flamed as clear as ever. By crabbed and common means—even the smudgy columns of a provincial newspaper—the vision had come to a country boy’s heart, and found there a divine, undeveloped quality of imagination, and an undisciplined power of enterprise. These two, which had hitherto united to keep him from his work, were now forged together in the heat of the new idea. But for the first he would never have heard the call, and the second alone made it possible that he should obey it.

3

Harry could not help laughing at the faces of Juglery and Elphick when he told them he meant to plough the Sunk Field.

“Brëak up grass, Mus’ Harry !”

“Surelye ! They’re asking farmers all over the country to grow more wheat.”

"Does Maaster know as you mean to plough the Sunk?"

"Reckon he does. I cud never do it wudout he let me."

"Well," said old Juglery, "I've bin on farm-work man and boy these dunnamany year, and I've only bruk up grass two times, and no good come of it, nuther. Wunst it wur fur oald Mus' Backfield up at Odiam, him wot caum to nighe a hundred year, and then took a fit last fall and died of joy when he heard as wheat wur ninety shillings a quarter. T'other wur pore young Mus' Pix of the Trulilows, and he bruk up a valiant pasture, and the oats caum up crawling about like pease, and each had a gurt sqlulgy root lik a pertater. I says to him, being young and joking like in those days, 'You're unaccountable lucky,' says I, 'to grow pease and pertaters on the same stalk,' but he took it to heart, and went and shot himself in the oast. So you see as boath the yeomen I bruk up grass fur died, one o' joy and t'other o' sorrow."

"Well, I shan't die of nuther, and we'll have the plough out Thursday if the weather hoalds."

The men were getting used to being ordered about by Harry. Mus' Beatup's chill had gone off in a twisting bout of rheumatism, which returned every now and then with damp weather. He spent, therefore, a good deal of time in the house, with sometimes a hobble as far as the Rifle Volunteer, appearing only in the dry, frosty weather when little could be done with harrow or plough. However, when neighbouring farmers began to remark on the enterprise of Worge, he was careful to take the credit to himself—indeed he almost fancied that it was his own doing, for Harry, who could have done nothing without his authority, was careful to consult him on every occasion, and it was Mus' Beatup who ordered the grain and checked the accounts, with many groans and dismal foretellings.

Those were good days for Harry, behind his plough. Under the soft grey spring sky, rifted and stroked by wandering primrose lights, through the damp air that smelled of living mould, over the brown earth that rolled and sprayed like a wave from the driving coulter, he toiled sweating in the raw March cold. The smell of earth, the smell of his own sweat, the smell of the sweat of his horses hung thick over the plough, but every now and then soft damp puffs of air would blow into the miasma the fragrance of grass and primrose buds, of sticky, red, uncurling leaves, and the new moss in the woods. The share gleamed against the dun, and the brown twigs of the copses drew their spindled tracery against a sky which was the paler colour of earth—sometimes a shower would fall, slanting along the hedges, the thick drops tasting on Harry's lips of the unfulfilled spring.

His work made him very tired. After all, he was barely seventeen, and though sturdy had only just begun to use his strength. The work of the farm was much increased by the new plan, yet it was impossible to bring extra hands to it, except occasionally by the conscription of Zacky. Harry milked and ploughed and scattered and dug, rising in the foggy blue darkness of the morning, and often sitting up late over calculations and accounts. Elphick and Juglery gave a pottering, rheumatic service, Mus' Beatup could only be irregularly relied upon. So in time Harry learned what it was to doze off out of sheer weariness over his supper, or fall across the bed asleep before he had pulled his trousers off. But strangely enough, he found the life no hardship. Before the first thrill of enterprise had passed he was beginning to like the work for its own sake. There was a new keen pleasure in the wearing of his muscles, almost a physical luxury in his fatigue, and the lying with spread limbs before the fire of evenings. His life seemed good and full—everything was worth while, eat-

ing or sleeping or toiling or resting. For the earth sometimes makes of her servants lovers.

He was far too busy during his working hours and weary during his leisure to find much temptation in his old errant pleasures. Willie Sinden appealed in vain to a grimy, sweaty Harry asleep for an hour before the fire at night—he was too unaccountable wearied to vrother about ratting or Willie's new ferret; and he went to Senlac and Heathfield and Hailsham Fairs to sell beasts, not to drink gingerbeer or pot into the German Kaiser's mouth in the shooting-gallery. Even the distant woods had ceased to call, for Harry was now tasting their adventure in his daily work. The chocolate furrows of the Sunk Field were part of that same wonder which had teased him in the fluttering hazels of Molash Spinney or the wind in the gorse-thickets of Thunders Hill. The far-off village green of Bird-in-Eye was not more full of spells than the new-sown acres by Forges Wood. By his toil, and because he toiled as a man, from the spark of imagination within him, and not as a beast from the grind of circumstances without, he had brought the distant adventure home.

4

In February Tom's letters became more rousing. The 18th Sussex took part in the big advance on the Ancre, and though Tom himself did not do anything very exciting, he was no longer in the humiliating position of having never seen a German. His descriptions of battle were rather fumbling—"Then we had some tea and a chap got in from the Glosters who had his tunick torn something terrible."—"We come into a French village full of apple-trees and the walls were down so as you saw into the houses, and in one house there was a pot of ferns on the table." He also confessed, in reply to

a message from Zacky, that though he had seen several Germans, "with faces like roots," he had not, to his knowledge, killed one.

Mus' Beatup thought it necessary to improve on his son's letters at the pub.

"Tom's having valiant times," he would say to the bar of the Rifle Volunteer or of the Crown at Woods Corner. "He killed a German officer wud his bayunite and took his machine-gun. Mus' Archie Lamb is unaccountable proud of him, and says he's sure to be a lieutenant of the Sussex before long. He's a good lad is my lad, and it's a tedious shaum as he was tuk away from his praaper personal wark and maade a soldier of. There's none of my folk bin soldiers up till now—it's yeomen we're born and we doan't taake wages. . . . When's he think the war ull stop?—Well, it might be any time, if the Govunmunt doan't starve us all fust."

Sometimes Thyrsa Honey brought Tom's letters up to read to the family at Worge. She was rather shy of her future relations-in-law, who made no special effort to be agreeable to her. Mrs. Beatup persisted in looking on her as a designing woman who had forcibly captured the innocent Tom, Nell was too clever for her, and the males were grumpy and sidling. Only Ivy seemed to like her, but Ivy was on bad terms with her family at present, as ever since young Kadwell on leave had forsaken his sweetheart of the Foul Mile for her robuster charms, and the deserted one had turned up in rage and dishevelment to make a personal protest at Worge, the Beatups had chosen to resent her "goings on." They also threw Jerry Sumption in her teeth and vaguely accused her of "things." Now no young man ever came to Worge without her parents lamenting that they had a light daughter, and rows were frequent and undignified. So Ivy's liking was no recommendation of Thyrsa, who in consequence was suspected of goings on herself. However, she would not give up her visits, for

she knew Tom liked her to pay them, and often—rather tactlessly—sent messages to his family through her.

Thyrza knew more about the British front and the Battle of the Ancre than did the Beatups. Not that Tom could be eloquent even to her, but her imagination, warmed by love, was quicker to piece together the fragments and fill in the gaps. Also he told her things that he would not have told the others. It was she who heard the details of the great occasion on which he first actually and personally killed a German.

“I was sentry, and you always feel as the place is full of Boshes, and you think you see them and it isn’t them. Then one night after moon-up I thought I saw a Bosh over against the enemy wire, and I said to myself as he wasn’t a Bosh really, though my hair was all standing up on my head. Then he moved and I let fly with my rifle as I’ve done umpty times at nothing, and then he was still and I saw him hanging on the wire. Reckon he was dead, but I went on putting round after round into him I felt so queer—not scared only kind of enjoying it like as if you were shooting at the Fair, only I knew as I was killing something and it made me happy. But afterwards I got very cold and sick.”

“He never tells us how he feels about things,” complained Mrs. Beatup. “It’s never more’n ‘I had my dinner’ to us.”

“Reckon he doan’t git much time for writing letters. He knows as wot he tells me gits passed on to you.”

“Well, I’ll never say naun agaunst you, Thyrza Honey, but I must point out as he knew us afore he knew you. He’s unaccountable young to be shut of his mother, and it ud be praaperer if his messages wur to you through us.”

Mrs. Beatup’s voice was hoarse with dignity, and Thyrza hung her head.

“I’m the last as ud ever want to taake him away

from his mother," she murmured—and ten days later Mrs. Beatup got a thick smudgy letter on which Tom had spent hours of ink and sweat in obedience to Thyrza's command.

5

About a fortnight later an impudent-looking little girl with a big mouth came wobbling up Worge drive on a bicycle, and from a wallet extracted a telegram which she handed to Zacky, who sat on the doorstep peeling a stick. Zacky ran with it to his mother, who refused to open it.

"I'll have no truck with telegrams—they're bad things. Fetch your faather."

Zacky ran off in great excitement, and soon Mus' Beatup came lumbering in, very red after planting potatoes.

"Wot's all this, mother? —another of those hemmed telegrams?"

"Yes, and I reckon Tom's killed this time."

"Can't be—we only got a letter last night."

"Ivy says they taake four days to come over. He may have bin killed this mornun—got a shell in his stomach lik Viner's poor young boy."

"Maybe it's to say he's coming hoame," said Zacky.

"Shurru!" growled his father.

He tore the envelope, with a queer twitching of the corners of his mouth.

"He aun't killed," he said shakily—"only wounded."

A moan came from the mother's parted lips, and she closed her eyes.

"Maybe it's naun very tar'ble," continued the father. "They said 'serious' in Mus' Viner's telegram; here it's only—'regret to inform you that Private Beatup has been wounded in action.'"

"Will they let me go to him?"

"Aun't likely—he's over in France."

Mrs. Beatup did not cry, but all the colour went from her face and her lips were strangely blue. Then suddenly her head fell over the back of the chair.

"Zacky!" shouted Mus' Beatup—"fetch the whisky bottle that's in the pocket of my oald coat behind the door."

He put his arm round his wife, and lifted her head to his shoulder, while Zacky ran off with piercing howls. These were fortunately louder than those of the poor duck whose neck Ivy was wringing outside the stable. She rushed in, all bloody from her victim, and in a few moments had laid her mother on the floor, unfastened her dingy remains of stays, and dabbled her forehead with water, while Mus' Beatup, relieved of his stewardship, stumped about, groaning, and drank the whisky himself. In the midst of it all the big-mouthed little girl, forgotten in the drive, started beating on the door and demanding "if there was an answer, please." Zacky was sent to dismiss her and vented his grief on the messenger of woe by putting out his tongue at her till she was out of sight—a salute which she returned with all the increased opportunities that nature had given her.

Mrs. Beatup soon recovered.

"I caum over all swummy like . . . this is the first time I've swounded since Zacky wur born . . . I reckon this is sharper than childbirth."

The tears came at last, and she sobbed against Ivy's bosom.

"Doan't go vrothering, mother. I tell you it's naun tar'ble. They said 'seriously' when poor Sid Viner wur wounded to death, and Ted Podgam in Gallipoli. Maybe they'll send him hoame soon."

"I want to go to him. . . . He's got a hole in him. . . . Why do they kip his mother from him when he's sick? When he had measles he never let go my hand one whole

day, and he said, 'Stay wud me, mother—I feel tedious bad.' Maybe he's saying it now."

"And maybe he aun't. Maybe he's setting up in bed eating chicken and drinking wine, wud no more'n a piece off his big toe."

She took out a dirty handkerchief and wiped her mother's eyes. Then she said :

"I maun go and tell Thyrza Honey."

6

But the fates had decided to honour Tom's mother above his sweetheart in that it was she alone who bore the full grief of his wounding. On her way to the shop, Ivy met Thyrza engaged in something as near a run as her plump person was capable of, and waving in her hand a letter. It was a pencil-scrawl written in hospital at Boulogne, telling Thyrza not to vrother, because he was doing valiant. He had got a Blighty one and hoped to be sent home soon. It was nothing serious, only a bit of shrap in his foot. "Didn't I tell mother as it was no more'n a piece off his big toe?" cried Ivy triumphantly.

The letter had been Thyrza's first news of Tom's wound, and all the anxiety and yearning she felt were swallowed up in the joy of his coming home. A few days later she had a telegram from him, telling of his arrival in hospital at Eastbourne, and by this time Mrs. Beatup had recovered sufficiently to resent the fact that it had been sent to Thyrza and not to her.

Everyone was glad that Tom was at Eastbourne, as it could be reached from Sunday Street in a few hours by carrier's cart and train. The very next morning Mrs. Beatup and Mrs. Honey set out together, the latter with a basket of eggs and flowers, and her pockets bulging with Player's cigarettes, the former nursing a weighty

dough-cake, beloved of Tom in ancient times, and so baked that she fondly hoped he would never notice the nearly total absence of sugar and plums. Thyrza looked very unlike herself in a close-fitting blue jersey and knitted cap; Mrs. Beatup wore what she called her Sunday cape, which is to say the cape she would have worn on Sundays if she had ever had the leisure to go out, likewise her Sunday bonnet (similarly conditioned), made of black straw and bearing a good crop of wheat.

The two women went by carrier's cart to Hailsham, where they took the train, arriving at Eastbourne soon after one. They went first to a creamery, where they rather hesitatingly ordered poached eggs and a pot of tea. The eggs were stale and the tea had not that "body" which their custom required. Mrs. Beatup began to wonder what Tom was getting to eat—if this was what you got when you paid for it, what did you get when you didn't pay for it? she'd like to know.

She was a little relieved at the sight of Tom, looking much fatter and browner and better in hospital than she had ever seen him outside it. He looked happy, too, with his broad face all grins to see them, his mother and sweetheart. And since he looked so brown and well and happy, she wondered why it was that she wanted so much to cry.

Thyrza did not want to cry. She held Tom's hand, and laughed, and was quite talkative, for her. She made him tell her over and over again how he had been wounded, and how they had taken him to the base hospital and then to Boulogne, and then in a hospital ship all signed with the cross to Blighty. Mrs. Beatup made up her mind that next time she would come alone.

And so she did—much to the surprise of her family, who had hitherto found her full of qualms and fears even at the thought of a visit to Senlac.

"I mun have my boy to myself whiles I've got the chance," she said.

"Well," remarked Ivy tactlessly, "I reckon he'd sooner have you separate—he'll be wanting Thyrsa aloan a bit."

"Will he, miss? That aun't why I'm going different days. We aun't all lik you wud your kissings and loverings. I wish to goodness you'd git married and have done."

"And taake some poor boy away from his mother," mocked Ivy. "I wouldn't be so cruel."

Her mother made a swoop at her with her open hand, but Ivy dodged, and ran off, laughing good-naturedly.

None of the other Beatups ever went to see Tom at Eastbourne. The journey was too expensive, and they were sure to have him home on leave before long. Mrs. Beatup went about twice a week, with various messages from the rest of the family muddled up in her head. She would sit beside him, holding his hand, strangely delicate with sickness, between her own hard, cracked, work-weary ones, wishing that they could find more to say to each other, and at the same time cherishing those numbered moments when she could have him to herself. Thyrsa went oftener, shutting up shop with a recklessness that would have ruined a less personal business. Tom's only other visitor was the Reverend Mr. Sump-tion.

He came one afternoon to inquire about Jerry, but Tom could not tell him much. Jerry kept away from him, and the little that Beatup knew of his doings he was anxious to conceal from his father.

"Maybe now he's out there he'll get on better," he suggested.

"Better? He's always done well," said Mr. Sumption loftily. "He'll have to do unaccountable well if he does better. Don't think, Tom, that I came to you because I doubted my son, but he was never much of a letter-writer, and now, being busy and all . . ."

That night Tom lay awake an hour or so, thinking of

parents. It was queer how they stuck to their children. His mother, now, coming all this way to see him, though she was nervous of the journey and had very little money to spend on it. . . . Mr. Sumption, too, standing up for that lousy tyke of a Jerry. . . . Would he ever feel like this for one of his own flesh—not only when that one lay helpless and dependent on him, but had gone out from him and chosen his own path? “Even as a father pitieth his children . . .” so the Bible said, and seemingly there was no bound or end to that pity. Perhaps one day he would feel it in his own heart (the curve of Thyrza’s arms made him think of a cradle). He remembered what Mr. Sumption had said to him long ago, the night before he joined up—“You’ll understand a bit of what I feel . . . some day when you’re the father of a son.”

7

Perhaps it was the inactivity of the days that made Tom lie awake so much at night. He generally had an hour or two to wait for sleep, and it seemed as if in those hours his thoughts jumped and raced in a way they never did by daylight. It was in those hours that he formed his resolution to marry Thyrza before he went back to France. When he left hospital he would probably have a fortnight or so at home, and they could be married at once by licence. Then, he felt, with a sudden swallowing in his throat, he would have had his little bit of life, even if Fritz cut it short before he could see those arms he loved become the cradle he had dreamed them.

The future meant even less to him now than the past. An almighty present ruled the world in those days, for it was all that a man could call his own. Lord! if that crump had dropped a few yards nearer, he might have lost the chances he was grabbing now. He wondered how a year ago he could ever have dreamed and dawdled

over his love for Thyrza, put off its declaration to a vague and distant time which might never be. It was queer how he had counted on the future then, made plans for doing things "sometime." The last year had taught him how close that sometime stood to Never. Not that Tom felt any forebodings. Indeed, he had the optimistic fatalism of most soldiers. He was safe until a shell came along with his number on, and then—well, many better chaps' numbers had been up before his. Meantime, it was his business to seize the present hour and all it contained, nor, when he planted, think of gathering, nor in the seed-time dream of harvest.

He never doubted Thyrza's readiness, and was a little surprised when she mentioned things like "gitting some cloathes," and "having the house done." Experience had not yet taught her to mistrust the future—for her to-morrow always came, and must be decently prepared for. However, when she saw how desperately Tom was set on marriage, she brushed aside the scruples of habit with a heroism they both of them failed to see.

"I'll marry you soon as you come hoame, dear, and then we can have a bit of honeymoon."

"We'll go away. I'll take you to Hastings, maybe—we'll git a room there."

"Oh, Tom! Lik a grand couple! We mun't go chucking the money away."

"We woan't chuck it all away, but we'll chuck a fair-sized bit. I doan't git much chance of spending out there."

She looked at him tenderly.

"To think as I ever thought you wur slower nor me!"

"I wur a gurt owl," said Tom. "Lord! if I'd a-gone West, and never so much as kissed you . . ."

"But you did kiss me, dear—in the shop, the evenun afore you went away."

"Twur only your hand, and I wur all quaaking like a calf."

Thyrza sighed.

"It wur a lovely kiss."

The Beatups were naturally indignant at Tom's decision. To them it savoured of undue haste, if not of indecency. Courtships in Sunday Street usually lasted from two to ten years. Indeed, Maudie Speldrum had been wooed for fifteen years before she took matters into her own hands and proposed to Bert Pix. Tom had not been engaged to Thyrza six months. What did they want to get married for? And what was Tom but a lad?—a mere child in his mother's eyes—a calf that Mrs. Honey was leading to market, all ignorant (as she could not be) of what lay ahead. In Sunday Street, marriage was the end—the end of love, the end of youth—and mixed with Mrs. Beatup's jealousy of the other woman and suspicion of her motives, was the desire to keep her son a little longer in the frisky meadows of his boyhood before he was led to those lean pastures she knew so well.

8

About the middle of March, Tom was moved to a convalescent hospital at Polegate, and a fortnight later sent home. Worge gave him a big hail, and the whole family, including Thyrza, sat down to a supper which was supposed to outshine the best efforts of hospital. That supper was not only a welcome but a farewell. When he had eaten two more in the muddle of his kin, he would eat a third in quiet, alone with Thyrza. The few necessary preparations for his marriage had been made, and the room was booked in Hastings for the third day from now. His happiness made him dreamy, and also tender towards those he was to leave, for though he had not realised his mother's jealousy of his sweetheart, he vaguely understood that it would hurt her to lose him, as lose him she must when he went to

this other woman's arms. So he held her hand under the table oftener and longer than he held Thyrza's, and kissed her good night without being asked.

The next day Harry took him to see the spring sowings. They were finished now, and the chocolate acres lay moist and furrowed in a muffle of misty April sunshine. Harry, more thickset and sinewy than of old, tramped a little behind his brother, as a workman after an inspector, with sidelong glance at Tom's brown, stubborn profile, anxious to see if praise or delight could be read there.

Tom was indeed delighted with the fruits of Harry's industry, swelling in soft, scored curves from Worge's southern boundaries at Forges Wood to the northern limits of the Street. But he was also aghast.

"You'll never have the labour to kip and reap this—and you've bruk up grass!"

"I can manage valiant till harvest, and then I'll git extra hands. As for the grass, 'twur only an old-fool's idea that it mun never be ploughed."

"And I reckon 'tis a young-fool's idea to plough it," said Tom rebukingly.

"The newspaaper said as grass-lands mun be bruk up now, to maaake more acres."

"And wot does the paaper know about it?"

"A lot, seemingly."

"It aun't lik to know more than men as have worked on the ground all their lives, and their faathers before 'em. Any farmer ull tell you as it's hemmed risky to plough grass."

"The paaper never said as it wurn't risky, but it said as farmers must taake some risks these times, and git good crops fur the country, and help on the War."

"Doan't you go vrothering about the War, youngster. It aun't no concern of yourn—and I reckon it woan't help us Sussex boys much if our farms go to the auctioneer's while we're away."

"Worge woan't go to the auctioneer's. You spik lik faather wud his faint heart. And a lot of good it'll do if you chaps beat the Germans out there and we have to maake peace 'cos we're starving wud hunger at home."

"There'll be no starving—you taake it from me. We'll have 'em across the Rhine in another six months, so 'kip the home-fires burning till the lads' returning,' and doan't go mucking up the farm fur the saake of a lot of silly stuff you read in the paapers."

But Harry stuck doggedly to his idea—

"I mun try, Tom—and I'll never git the plaace sold up, fur we're spending naun extra save fur the seed and a bit of manure. I go unaccountable wary, and do most of the wark myself, wud faather to help me on his good days, and Juglery and Elphick stuck on jobs as they can't do no harm at. It'll do Worge naun but good in the end—wheat's at eighty shilling a quarter, and guaranteed—and anyhow, I tell you, I mun try."

Tom was impressed.

"Well, Harry, I woan't say you aun't a good lad. But it maakes me unaccountable narvous. Here have I bin toiling and sweating this five year jest to kip the farm together, and now you go busting out all round and saying it ull win the War. Wot if we chaps out there doan't win, t'aun't likely as you will. Howsumdever . . ."

Tom's marriage was on the Thursday of Easter week. All the morning a soft teeming fog lay over the fields, drawing out scents of growth and warmth and life. Worge lay in the midst of it like the ghost of a farm, a dim grey shadow on the whiteness, and the voices of her men came muffled, as in dreams. Towards noon

the sunshine had begun to eat away the mist—it grew yellower, streakier, and at last began to scatter, rolling up the fields in solemn clouds, balling and pilling itself against the hedges, melting into the April green of the woods; and then suddenly it was gone—sucked up into the sky, sucked down into the earth, living only in a few drops in the cups of violets.

The Bethel stared away across the fields to Puddledock. For some time its roof, with the chipped Georgian pediment, had risen above the mist. Then the grim windows had come out to stare, and then the tombstones that grew round its feet, leaning and tottering among the chapel weed.

Tom and Thyrsa were to be married at the Bethel. This had caused some surprise in the neighbourhood, as the Beatups had always been “Church”; but friendship and convenience had led to the decision—friendship for the Reverend Mr. Sumption, because Tom knew him better than Mr. Pouletts-Smith, and was sorry for him on account of Jerry, convenience because the chapel was close at hand, and the makers of the wedding breakfast would have time to run across and witness the ceremony, which they could not have done had it taken place at Brownbread Street, two miles away.

The only one to whom these reasons seemed inadequate was Nell. To her the proceeding was not only heretical but mean—her affection for the Church had always been led by taste rather than belief, and her attitude, which she had considered (under instruction) as that of an orthodox Anglican, was in reality that of an Italian peasant, who looks upon his church as his drawing-room, a place of brightness to which he can go for refuge from the drabness of every day. Her opposition to the chapel marriage was based on an emotion similar to what she would have felt for the party who, with the chance of eating and drinking

out of delicate china in the drawing-room, chose to devour their food out of broken pots in the scullery. She did not acknowledge this, any more than she acknowledged the motive which fed uneasily on Mr. Poulett-Smith's inevitable disgust; she talked to Tom about his duty as a Baptized Churchman, and was both surprised and grieved to find that the War seemed to have destroyed what little sense of this he had ever had.

"I tell you as it's all different out there. There aun't no church and chapel saum as there is here. You stick to church on Church Parade down at the base, but when you're up in the firing line, there's a queer kind of religion going around. You hear chaps praying as if they wur swearing and swearing as if they wur praying, and in the Y.M. plaace they have sort of holy sing-songs wud priests and ministers all mixed up; and I've heard a Catholic priest read the English funeral over one of us, and I've seen a rosary on a dead Baptist's neck. Church and chapel may be all very good for civvies, but you can't go vrothering about such things when you're a soldier."

Nell was hurt and frightened by these sayings. She had an idea that any danger or suffering would only make a man cling closer to the Sanctuary. It was terrible to think that at the first earthquake Peter's Rock cracked to its foundations. A defiant loyalty inspired her, and at first she made up her mind not to go to the wedding, but she could not resist the temptation of asking Mr. Poulett-Smith's advice, and he thought she had better attend, and pray for the backsliders. He also earnestly bade her distrust any appearance of cracks in Peter's Rock, and she went away comforted, with shining eyes and burning cheeks, and her church standing firmer than ever on the rock which was neither Peter nor Christ, but her love for a very ordinary young man.

So all the Beatups went to the Bethel, leaving Worge locked up and the yard in charge of Elphick. Mrs. Beatup wore her Sunday bonnet, the wheat-crop having been superseded, contrary to all the laws of rotation, by one of small green grapes. Both Ivy and Nell had new gowns, Ivy looking squeezed and unnatural in a sky-blue cloth, which together with a pair of straight-fronted corsets, she had bought at a Hastings dress agency—Nell pretty and demure in a grey coat and skirt, and one of those small towny-looking hats which seemed to find their way to her head alone in all Dallington. Mus' Beatup, with Harry and Zacky, smelled strongly of hair-oil and moth-killer, and Harry had nearly scrubbed his skin off in his efforts to get out of it the earth of his new furrows. He was considered too young to be Tom's best man, and the office had been at the last moment unexpectedly filled by Bill Putland. Bill, now a sergeant, was home on seven days' leave, looking very brown and smart, and Polly Sindens, who, not having been invited with her parents to the breakfast, had vowed she would waste no time going to the chapel, suddenly changed her mind and appeared in her most ceremonial hat.

The chapel was packed with Sindens, Bourners, Putlands, Hubbles, Viners, Kadwells, Pixes. Mrs. Lamb of Bucksteep was there, with Miss Marian, but as she had not thought it necessary to put on the elegant clothes in which she was seen gliding into church on Sundays, her presence was regarded as an affront rather than an honour; Mrs. Beatup would have dressed herself in her best for any Bucksteep wedding, and thought that the squire's wife might have done the same for her. Also, she came in very late, and her entrance was mistaken for that of the bride by many folk, who shot up out of the pew-boxes, only to be disappointed by the sight of Mrs. Lamb's faded, powdered features behind a spotted veil, and Miss Marian swing-

ing along after her with a tread like a policeman. "I reckon my feet are smaller than hers," thought Nell, "for all that I'm only a farmer's daughter."

Then Mr. Sumption came out of the vestry, and stood under the pulpit to wait for the bride. He looked more like a figure of cursing than of blessing—black as a rook, with his thick curly hair falling into his eyes, yet not quite hiding the furrows which the plough of care had dragged across his forehead. There was a rustle and a flutter and a turning of heads, as Thyrsa came up the aisle on the arm of the bachelor cousin who was giving her away. She wore a grey gown like a March cloud, and carried a bunch of flowers, and the congregation whispered when they saw that she had sleeked her feathery hair with water, so that it lay smooth behind her ears, which were round and pink like those of mice. "It didn't look like Thyrsa," everyone said—and perhaps that was why Tom was so loutishly nervous, and nearly broke Bill Putland's heart with his fumbings and stutterings.

Thyrsa was nervous too, her head drooped like an over-blown rose upon its stalk, and Mr. Sumption's manner was not of the kind that soothes and reassures. He shouted at the bride and bridegroom, and "thumped at" various members of the congregation who whispered or (later in the proceedings) yawned. He was not often asked to officiate at weddings, and had apparently decided to make the most of this one, for he wound up with an address to the married pair so lengthy and apocalyptic that Mrs. Beatup became anxious as to the fate of a pudding she had left to "cook itself," and rising noisily in her pew creaked out through a silence weighted with doom. "And whosoever hath not a wedding garment," the minister shouted after her, "shall be cast into the outer darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth"—for which Mrs. Beatup never forgave him, as she had spent nearly

three shillings on retrimming her bonnet, "and if her cape wurn't good enough fur him, she reckoned he'd never seen a better on the gipsy-woman's back."

The service came to an end at last, and the congregation pushed after the bride to see her get into the cab drawn by a pair of seedy greys, which would take her the few yards from the chapel to the farm. The breakfast was to be at Worge, for Thyrza had no kin besides the bachelor cousin, and it was considered more fitting that her husband's family should undertake the social and domestic duties of the occasion. The feast was spread in the kitchen, which had been decorated with flags, lent for the afternoon from the club-room of the Rifle Volunteer. The unsugared wedding-cake was a terrible humiliation to Mrs. Beatup, who felt sure that, in spite of her repeated explanations, everyone would put it down to poverty and meanness instead of to the tyranny of "Govunmunt." However, she had restored the balance of her self-respect by providing wine (at eighteenpence the bottle).

There was much laughter and good-humour and the wit proper to weddings as the guests squeezed themselves round the table. Even Mr. Sumption's five-minute grace, in which he approvingly mentioned more than one dish on the table, but added to his score with Mrs. Beatup by referring to the wine as poison and "the forerunner of thirst in hell," was only a temporary blight. The bride and bridegroom alone looked subdued, their sleek heads drooping together, their hands nervously crumbling their food—also Ivy, who was heard to say in a hoarse whisper to Nell, "If I can't go somewheres and taake my stays off I shall bust." However, in time she forgot her constriction in flirting with Thyrza's bachelor cousin, who had pale blue eyes, bulging out as if in vain effort to catch sight of a receding chin, and was exempt by reason of ruptured hernia from military service.

The usual healths were drunk, and the sight of other people drinking—for he himself would take only water—seemed to intoxicate Mr. Sumption, and he forgot the cares that had made his black hair as ashes on his head—his sleepless anxiety for Jerry, and the crying in him of that day which shall burn the stubble—and became merry as a corn-fed colt, laughing with all his big white teeth, and paying iron-shod compliments to Thyrza and Ivy and Nell, and even Mrs. Beatup, who maintained, however, an impressive indifference. Bill Putland made the principal speech of the afternoon, and looked so smart and handsome, with his hair in a soaring quiff and a trench-ring on each hand, that Ivy might have plotted to substitute his arm for Ern Honey's round her waist, if she had not been too experienced to fail to realise that he was about the only man in Dallington she could not win with her floppy charms.

In the end all was cheerful incoherence, and just as the sunshine was losing its heat on the yard-stones, the bride and bridegroom rose to go away. A trap from the Volunteer would drive them to the station, and they climbed into it through a flying rainbow of confetti, which stuck in Thyrza's loosening hair, and spotted her dim gown with colours.

Amidst cheering and laughter the old horse lurched off, and soon Thyrza's grey and Tom's dun were blurred together in the distance, which was already staining with purple as the air thickened towards the twilight. The guests turned back into the house, or scattered over fields and footpaths. Ivy rushed upstairs to take off her stays, and Bill Putland swaggered home between his parents, with a flower in his button-hole and plans in his heart for an evening at Little Worge. The Reverend Mr. Sumption went off with Bournier to the smithy. The blacksmith had a shoeing and a clipping to do, and the minister would sit and watch him in the red, hoof-smelling warmth, and lend an experienced hand if

occasion needed. Mus' Beatup, his tongue all sour with the Australian wine, took advantage of the general flit to creep along the hedge to the Rifle Volunteer, there to wait for the magic stroke of six and unlocking of his paradise.

Mrs. Beatup was the last to leave the doorstep. She thought she could hear the old horse clopping on the East Road, and when her eyes no longer helped her to follow her son, she used her ears. She remembered that earlier occasion when she had gone with him to the end of the drive and kissed him there. He had wanted her then ; he did not want her now—his good-bye kiss had been kind yet perfunctory. Another woman had him—a woman who had never suffered pain or discomfort or anxiety or privation for his sake. Yet her jealousy had unexpectedly died. Somehow, to-day, all that she had suffered for Tom when she bore him, nursed him, reared him and bred him, seemed a sufficient reward in itself. Her sufferings had made him what he was, and this other woman took only what she, his mother, had made. "She never went heavy wud him, nor bore him in pain, nor lay awaake at night wud his screeching, nor thought as he'd die when he cut his teeth, nor went all skeered when he took the fever. . . . So thur aun't no sense in vrothering. Reckon he'll always be more mine nor hers, even if I am never to set eyes on him agaun."

10

Tom and Thyrsa came back from Hastings in a few days. They talked as if they had been away for weeks, and indeed it had seemed weeks to them—not that any moment had faltered or dragged, but each had held the delight of hours, and each hour had been a day of new wonder. Perhaps the dazzle was brightest for Tom—Thyrsa could remember an earlier honeymoon, which

had held no presage of darkness to follow, and she slipped back pretty easily into the old habit of having a man about her ; but for Tom even the traces of her here and there in the room, her hat thrown down, her petticoat trailing over a chair, the dim scent of clover that hung on her pillow, making her bed like a field, all joined to bind him with her enchantment, to drug him with an ecstasy which had its sweet foundation in the commonplace.

When they came back to Sunday Street the honeymoon did not end. Contrariwise, it seemed to wax fuller in the freedom of the old ways. Even sweeter than the sense of passionate holiday was the taking up of a common life together, the daily sharing of food and work and rest, the doing of things he had done a hundred times before, but never like this. Thyrza's little cottage had been hung with new curtains, and some unknown hand—which afterwards unexpectedly proved to be Nell's—had filled it with flowers on the evening of their return. Bunches of primroses, violets and bluebells stuffed the vases in bedroom and parlour, and the soft fugitive scent of April banks mixed with the scent of lath and plaster which haunts old cottages, and the more spicy, powdery smells of the shop.

The days were warm and drowsy, and the fields lay in a muffle of sunshine, their distances all blurred with heat. Round every farm the orchards rolled in pink-stained clouds of bloom, and the young wheat was green as a rainy sunset. The wind that brought the mutter of the guns, brought also the bleating of lambs from the pastures ; scents seemed to hang and brood on the air, or drift slowly from the woods—scents of standing water and budding thorn, of hazel leaves hot in the sun, and soft mixed fragrances of gorse and fern, of cows, of baking earth, of currant bushes in cottage gardens. . . .

Towards evening Tom and Thyrza usually closed the shop, and came out—either for a stroll up to Worge to

see his family, or for some more adventurous excursion to Brownbread Street, or Furnacefield, or up to the North Road and the straggle of old Dallington. They had one or two quite long walks, for a new enterprise had kindled in them both, and for the first time there was mystery and allure in some shaky signpost at the throws, or a little lane creeping off secretly. One day they walked as far as Brightling, past the obelisk, through the shuttling dimness of Pipers Wood and up Twelve Oaks Hill by strange farms to the sudden clump of Brightling among the trees. They went into the churchyard where the yews spread shadows nearly as dark as their own blackness and strange white peacocks perched on the tombstones, with shrill, unnatural cries. There was also a huge cone-shaped object, built of damp stones and thickly grown with moss, and Thyrza unaccountably took fright at this, and the peacocks, and the shadows and the trees, and walked for most of the way home with her head under Tom's coat.

He did not often think of when this time should end, of the day that crept nearer and nearer to him over drowsing twilights and magical, green sunrises. He knew that a month hence all this delight would be a memory, that between him and the spurge-thickening fields of May would lie all the life of ugly adventure into which fate had pitched him—and Thyrza would come to him only on scraps of paper, in puffs of scent, in fugitive dreams, in a passing light in some other girl's eyes. . . . But he was too simple and too happy to let thoughts of the future spoil the present, besides, his habit of disregarding the future now stood his friend. He would not see the clover in bloom, but saw it in the green—deep, rippling, gleaming, like the sea—he would miss the hay, but now he could see the buttercups under the moon, so yellow that they seemed to paint the sky and turn the moon to honey ; Thyrza might in a month's time be a memory, belong to phantasy, but now she was

a woman solid and close, his woman, the maker of his home, the maker of himself anew. . . . Once his mother had borne him, and now it seemed as if this woman had borne him again, into a new experience, a new happiness, a new wonder—so perfect and complete that sometimes he almost felt as if it did not matter whether he held it for ever or for a day.

II

On his last evening, he went up to Worge to say good-bye. He felt already as if he did not belong to the place. Harry's drastic dealings with the tilth seemed to have taken the fields away from him—he no longer felt even a distant guardianship of those brown-ribbed acres which had been green when he worked on them. He felt, too, with a sense of estrangement, the dirt and litter of the house, the muddling business which at six o'clock had Ivy swilling out the scullery and Mrs. Beatup still struggling with the washing. Thyrza never did a stroke of housework after dinner, and yet her morning's tasks were never hurried; she never had Ivy's flushed, red face and tousled hair, or Mrs. Beatup's forehead shiny with sweat.

His family were conscious of this—conscious that he now had a standard of comparison by which to measure their short-comings, and it made them sulkily suspicious in their attitude. He was already the alien—the bird that has left the nest, the puppy that has grown up and gone a-hunting on his own. But this sense of estrangement only seemed to make his parting sadder, for he vaguely felt as if he had left them before he need, had already divided himself from them by an earlier good-bye, of which this was only the echo and the ghost.

Mrs. Beatup enquired politely after Thyrza, and sent Ivy out to fetch in the others. Zacky climbed on Tom's knee and asked him to send him home a German helmet, and Harry—whose heart was really very warm and

loving towards Tom—stood shyly behind his chair and could not speak a word. Mus' Beatup gave Tom an account of the Battle of the Ancre, but failed to create the usual respectful impression.

"You see, faather, I was out there, and I know that it happened different. St. Quentin aun't anywhere near the Rhine."

"There's more'n one St. Quentin, saum as there's more'n one Mockbeggar, and more'n one Iden Green. How do you know as there's no St. Quentin on the Rhine? You've never bin there, and you'll never be there, nuther."

"I reckon I'll be there before I'm many months older."

"You woan't," said Mus' Beatup solemnly, "it's more likely as the Germans ull be crossing the River Cuckmere than as you'll ever be crossing the River Rhine. Now, be quiet, Nell, and a-done do, fur I tell you it's bin proved as we'll never git to the River Rhine, so where's the sense of going on wud the war, I'd like to know?"

"To prevent the Germans crossing the River Cuckmere," snapped Nell.

"Oh, doan't go talking such tar'ble stuff," moaned Mrs. Beatup. "If the Germans caum here I'd die of fits."

"They woan't come here," said her husband, "and we'll never git there, so wot's the sense of all this vrother, and giving up our lads and ploughing up our grass and going short of beer, all to end where we started? If this war had bin a-going to do us any good, it ud a-done it before now, surelye; but it's a lousy, tedious, lament-aable war, and the sooner we git shut of it the better."

"Well, I must be going," said Tom, standing up. He felt rather angry with his father, who, he thought, talked like a "conscientious objector," and was prostrating his mighty intellect to base uses. "But maybe the beer has addled him—he's had a regular souse this winter, by his looks."

He said good-bye to the family, refusing his mother's invitation to stay to supper, as he had promised to take Thyrza for a walk that evening. However, he asked her to come with him to the door, as there was something he wanted to say to her alone.

Mrs. Beatup felt pleased at this mark of confidence, but all Tom had to say as he kissed her on the threshold was—

“Mother, if anything wur to happen to me . . . out there, you know . . . you'd be good to Thyrza?”

“Oh, Tom—you aun't expecting aught?”

“I hope not, surely—but how am I to know?”

Her face wrinkled for crying.

“You didn't use to spik lik that. . . .”

“Come, Mother—be sensible. There aun't no sense spikking different, things being wot they are. I dudn't use to be married . . . it's being married that maakes a chap think of wot might happen.”

“You'd want me to taake Thyrza to live here? . . .”

“Reckon I wouldn't. She'll have her liddle bit of money, thank God, and maybe a pension besides. It aun't money as I'm thinking of—it's just—it's just as she'll break her heart.”

“And I'll break mine, too, I reckon.”

Tom groaned.

“You're a valiant help to me, mother. I ask you a thing to maake me a bit easier, and all you do is to vrother me the more.”

“Doan't you go abusing your mother, Tom—wud your last breath. If Thyrza's heart gits broke I'll give her a bit of mine to mend it with—but no good ever caum of talking of such things.”

“I woan't talk of them no more. Only, it had to be done—you see, mother, there might be a little 'un as well as Thyrza . . .”

“Oh, Tom, a liddle baby fur you!”

He blushed—“There aun't no knowing, and I'd be easier if . . .”

" Oh, but I'd justabout love a liddle grandchild. You need never fret over that, Tom. I'd give my days to a liddle young un of yourn."

He kissed her, and they parted in love.

12

He hurried back to Thyrsa, and they shut up the shop, and went out to the field by the willow pond. A green, still dusk lay over the fields and sky; no stars were out yet, but the chalky moon hung low over the woods of Burntkitchen. The distant guns were silent, only the bleating of lambs came from the Trulilows, and every now and then a burst of liquid, trilling, sucking melody from a blackbird among the willows.

' Hark to the bird," said Thyrsa.

' Maybe he's got a nest full of liddle 'uns. '

" And a liddle wife as can't sing—funny how hen-birds never sing, Tom."

" Thyrsa, I wish as I cud maake a home fur you, dear."

' Wotever maakes you think of that? The birds' nest? Reckon I've got a dential liddle home."

" But it's wot you've always lived in. I never built it for you."

" Doan't you go fretting over that. I'd be lonesome wudout the shop, Tom—I doan't think as I'll ever want to be wudout the shop. And we've bin so happy there together. It's saum as if you'd built it fur me, since you've maade it wot it never was before."

He drew her close to him, sleek, soft, heavy, like a little cat, and leaned his cheek against her hair.

" Reckon I'll always think of you in it. . . . I'll see you setting up in the mornun wud your eyes all blinky and your hair streaming down—and I'll see you putting on the kettle and dusting the shop, and maybe having a bit of talk over the counter wud a luckier chap than

me. And all the day through I'll see you, and in the swale you'll be putting your head out for a blow of air, and there'll be the lamp in the window behind you . . . and then you'll lie asleep, and the room ull be all moony and grey, and your liddle hand ull lie out on the blanket—so, and your breath ull come lik the scent out of the grass . . . and when you turn your body it'll be lik the grass moving in the wind—and I woan't be there to see or hear or touch or smell you."

His arm tightened round her breast, and she leaned against him as if she would fuse her body into his, share its travels, hardships and dangers. The stars were creeping slowly into the sky, dim and rayless in the thick Spring night, which had put a purple haze into the zenith, and made the great moon glow like a copper pan. The fields were blooming with a soft yellow—the waters of the pond had a faint gleam on their stagnation, and the willows were like smoke with a fire in its heart, their boughs pouring down in misty grey towards the water, with points and sparks of light here and there, as the radiance danced among their leaves.

The swell of the field against the eastern constellations was broken by the gable of the shop, rising over the hedge and pointing to the sign of the Ram. Tom's England—the England he would carry in his heart—had widened to take in that little humped roof of moss-grown tiles. It held not only the willow pond and the woman beside it, but the home where together they had eaten the bread and drunk the cup of common things. It was not perhaps a very lofty conception of fatherland—not even so high as Harry's conception of a country saved by his plough. Tom's country was only a little field-corner that held his wife and his home, but as he sat there under the stars, he felt in his vague, humble way, that it was a country a man would choose to fight for, and for which perhaps he would not be unwilling to die.

PART IV

IVY

I

TOWARDS June the country bounded by the Four Roads woke to a certain liveliness. A big camp had sprung up on the outskirts of Hailsham, on the ridge above Horse Eye, and the excitement spread to Brownbread Street, Sunday Street, Bodle Street, Ponto Green, Rushlake Green, and other Streets and Greens—and cottage gardens were a-swing with lines of khaki shirts, "soldiers' washing," taken in with high delight at an army's big spending.

The girls of the neighbourhood began to take new sweethearts with startling quickness. They came, these strangers from the North, leaving their girls behind them, and the girls of the South had lost their men to camps in France and Midland towns. No doubt some kept faith with the absent, but the spirit of the days mistrusted space as it mistrusted time, and the wisdom of love took no more account of happiness a hundred miles away than of happiness a hundred months ahead. There were wooings and matings and partings, all played out in the few spare hours of a soldier's day, in the few spare miles of his roaming, under the thundery thick sky of a Sussex summer, when heat and drench play their alternate havoc with the earth.

In those days Ivy Beatup lifted up her head. She had had a dull time since Kadwell and Viner and Pix

went out to France. Thyrsa's cousin had turned out miserable prey—he had actually proposed himself as her husband to her father and mother, bringing forward most satisfactory evidence of a more than satisfactory income, derived from Honey's Suitall Stores in Seaford. Thus the strain between Ivy and her family was increased, and her presence at home became a burden of reproach. They could not see why she refused to bestow her splendid healthy womanhood on this poor creature, why she would rather scrub floors and gut fowls than sit with folded hands in his parlour—that she had “taken him on” merely to kill time, and that it wasn't her fault if he chose to treat her seriously and make a fool of himself.

“You'll die an old maid,” said her mother. “You'll go to the bad,” said her father, and Ivy, who had no intention of doing either, felt angry and sore, and longed to justify herself by a new love-affair more gloriously conducted.

When the soldiers came to Hailsham, she saw her chance, and resolved to make the most of it. She persuaded Harry to take her into the town on market-day, and also found that she preferred the “pictures” there to those at Senlac. Polly Sinden refused to abet her—Bill Putland had given her distinct encouragement on his last leave, and Polly decided that in future discreet behaviour would become her best. So she refused to prowl of an evening with Ivy, either in Hailsham or Senlac, and Ivy—since no girl prowls alone—had to take up with Jen Hollowbone of the Foul Mile, the same whom Bob Kadwell had jilted, but who, soothed by time and a new sweetheart, had generously forgiven her rival, especially as Bob had once again transferred his affections, and was now no more Ivy's than Jen's.

The two girls went into Hailsham on market-days, and strolled that way of evenings, winning the South

Road by Stilliands Tower and Puddledock, through the little lanes and farm-tracks that were now all thick with June grass, and smelled of hayseed and fennel. With grass and goosefoot sticking to their skirts, and their hair spattered with the fallen blossoms of elderflower, they would come out on the South Road, where the dust swept through the twilight before the wind. Warm and flushed, with laughing eyes, and arms entwined, and slow proud movements of their bodies, the girls would stroll past the camp gates, leaning clumsily together and giggling. The men would come pouring out after the day's routine, seeking what diversion they could find in lane or market-town. It was in this way that Ivy met Corporal Seagrim of the Northumberland Fusiliers.

He was a tall, dark giant, well past thirty, with a becoming grizzle in his hair, over the temples. His face was brown as a cob-nut, and his speech so rough and uncouth in the northern way that at first Ivy could hardly understand him. They met in the market-place. He had a companion who paired with Jen—an undersized little miner, with a pale face and red lips, but good enough for Jen, since she already had a boy in France. Of course Ivy had several boys—but they were no more than good comrades, the inter-changers of cheery postcards on service and cheery kisses on leave. If she had had a boy like Jen's, she would have been more faithful to him than Jen was, but she was free to do as she liked with Seagrim—free when they met in the market-place, that is to say, for by the time they said good-bye at Four Wents under the stars, she was free no longer.

They had gone to the "pictures," but soon the moving screen had become a dazzle to Ivy, the red darkness an enchantment, the tinkling music an intoxication. Seagrim's huge brown hand lay heavily on hers, and her limbs shook as she leaned against his

shoulder, almost in silence, since they found it hard to understand each other's speech. The man thrilled and confused her as no other had done—whether it was his riper age, or his almost perfect physical beauty, or some strange animal force that thrilled his silence and slow clumsy movements, she did not seek to tell. Self-knowledge was beyond her—all she knew was that she could never give him the careless chum-like affection she had given her boys, that between them there never would be those light hearty kisses which she had so often taken and bestowed. She felt herself languid, troubled, full of a dim glamour that brought both delight and pain. The music, the red glow all seemed part of her sensation, though before she used scarcely to notice them, except to hail a popular tune or an opportunity for caresses.

When the show ended, the soldiers offered to walk with the girls as far as Four Wents, where the Puddledock lane joins the South Road. Jen and the miner walked on ahead, she holding stiffly by his arm, in a manner suitable to one demi-affianced elsewhere. Ivy and Seagrim followed. They did not speak; his arm was about her, and every now and then he would stop and pull her to him, dragging her up against him in silent passion, taking from her lips kiss after kiss. The aching passionate night looked down on them from the sky where the great stars jiggled like flames, was close to them in the hedges where the scented night-wind fluttered, and the dim froth of chervil and bennet swam against the hazels. For the first time Ivy seemed to feel a hushed yet powerful life in the country which till then she had scarcely heeded more than the music and red lamps of the show. Now the scents that puffed out of the grass made her senses swim, the soft sough of the wind over the fields, the distant cry of an owl in Tillighe Wood, made her heart ache with a longing that was half its own consummation, made

her lean in a drowse of ecstasy and languor against Seagrim's beating heart, as he held her in the crook of his arm, close to his side.

At the Wents the parting came, with a loud ring of laughter from Jen, and a "pleased to ha' met yo'" from the miner. But Ivy clung to her man, her eyes blurred with tears, her throat husky and parched with love as she murmured against his thick brown neck—

"I'll be seeing you agaun? . . ."

"Aye, and yo' will, li'l lass, li'l loove" . . . he swore, and straightway made tryst.

When he was gone the night still seemed full of him—his strength and his beauty and his wonder.

2

Ivy was in love. The glamour had transmuted her country stuff as surely as it transmutes more delicate substance. The spring rain falls on the thick-stalked hogweed as on the spurred columbine, and the divine poetry of Love had given to her, as to a more tender nature, its unfailing gift of a new heaven and a new earth.

Her whole being seemed gathered up into Seagrim, into a strange happiness which had its roots in pain. For the first time pain and happiness were united in one emotion; when she was away from him, pain was the strong partner, when with him, then happiness prevailed—and yet not always, for sometimes in his presence her heart swooned within her, and her face would grow pale under his kisses and a moan stifle in her throat, and also, sometimes, when he was away, a strange ecstasy would seize her, and all her world would shine, and her common things of slops and guts and mire become beautiful, and the very thought of his being dazzle all the earth. . . .

She never told him of this, indeed she herself scarcely

realised it. She felt in her thoughts a soft confusion, a happy bewilderment, a sweet ache, and everything was changed and everyone spoke with a new voice—the very kitchen boards were not the same since she met Seagrim, and her family had queer new powers of delighting and grieving her. “I must be in love,” she said to herself, and straightway bought her man a pound of the best tobacco at the Shop.

She was very good to him. Her hearty, generous nature found relief in spending itself upon him. She seldom came to the meeting-place without some present of tobacco or food—she did him a dozen little services, mended his clothes, marked his handkerchiefs, polished his buttons and his boots. Strangely spiritual as the depths of her love might be, its expression was entirely practical and animal. To serve him and caress him was her only way of revealing those dim marvels that swam at the back of her mind.

The man himself was bewitched. Her generosity touched him, and it would be a strange fellow indeed who would not love to hold her to him, sweet and tumbled like an overblown flower, and take the softness of her parted lips and sturdy neck. Ivy was like the month in which he wooed her—July, thick, drowsy, blooming, ripe, lacking the subtlety of spring and the dignity of autumn, but more satisfying to the common man who prefers enjoyment to promise or memory.

They met most evenings, he walking eastward, she westward, to Four Wents; there, where the tall stile stands between two shocks of fennel, they would lean together in the first charm of tryst, the dusk thickening round them, hazing road and fields and barns and bushes, their own faces swimming up out of it to each other's eyes, like reflections in a pond—hers round and flushed under her tousled hair, like a poppy in a barley-field, his brown and predatory with its hawk-

like nose and piercing eye under the grizzled curls. Then the dusk would smudge them into each other and they would become one in the swale. . . .

He led her up and down the little rutted lanes, under a violet sky where the stars were red and the moon was a golden horn. The thick fanning of the July air brought scents of hayseed and flowering bean, the miasmic perfume of meadowsweet, the nutty smell of ripening corn, and the drugged sweetness of hopfields. All round them would hang the great tender silence of night, the passionate stillness of the earth under the moon, and their poor broken words only seemed a part of that silence. . . . "My loove, my li'l lass." . . . "I love you unaccountable, Willie." . . . "Coom closer, my dear." . . . The wind rustled over the orchards of Soul Street, and the horns of the moon were red, and the sky thick and dark as a grape, when they came back to the tall stile at the throws, and parted there with caresses which love made groping and vows which love choked to whispers.

On Sundays they met more ceremonially, pacing up and down the road at Sunday Street, from the shop to the Rifle Volunteer—which was the parade-ground of those girls of the parish who had sweethearts. Here Jen Hollowbone showed her Ted and Polly Sinden her Bill, and Ivy Beatup showed her Willie, walking proudly on his arm, smiling with all her teeth at the girls whose sweethearts were away and at the girls who had no sweethearts at all.

She even brought him to Worge once or twice, but her family did not like him. This was partly because they were still the champions of the rejected Ern Honey, and partly because they resented his gruff manner, and harsh, rumbling speech. He did not shine in company—he was for ever boasting the superiority of Northumberland ways over those of Sussex, and even told Mus' Beatup that he "spake like a fule" on Ameri-

can Intervention. He horrified Nell by drinking out of his saucer—a depth below any of the family's most degrading collapses—and offended Harry and Zacky by taking no notice of them or interest in the farm. Indeed the only being at Worge he seemed to care about—not excepting Ivy, whom he almost ignored on these occasions—was Nimrod, the old retriever; to him alone he would smile and be friendly, hugging the old black head against his tunic, and patting and slapping Nim's sides till he became demoralised by this unaccustomed fondling and frisked about with muddy paws—which was all put down to Seagrim for unrighteousness in his account with Mrs. Beatup.

“Wot d'you want wud un, Ivy?” she asked once—“a gurt dark tedious chap lik that, wud never a good word for a soul—not even yourself, he doan't sim to have—and a furriner too.”

“He aun't a furriner.”

“He aun't from these parts, lik some I cud naum. You're a fool if you say no to a valiant chap lik Ernie Honey and taake up wud a black unfriendly feller as no one here knows naun about.”

“Well, he doan't have to have his inside tied up wud a truss lik a parcel of hay, caase it falls out.”

“You hoald your rude tongue. Wot right have you to know aught of Ern Honey's inside? And better a inside lik a parcel of hay than a heart lik a barnyard stone. He's a hard-hearted man, your sojer—cares for naun saave a pore heathen dog wot he brings spanneling into the kitchen.”

“He cares for me.”

“It doan't sim lik it wud his ‘Eh, lass?—eh, lass?’ whensumdever you spik. Reckon you maake yourself cheap as rotten straw when you git so stuck on him.”

“Who said I wur stuck on him?—he aun't the fust I've kept company with.”

"No, he aun't. You're parish talk wud your goings on. You'll die an oald maid in the wark'us, and bring us to shaum —and Harry ull bring us to auction, and Tom ull be killed by a German, and bring us to death in sorrow. All my children have turned agaunst me now I'm old," and Mrs. Beatup began to cry into her apron.

Ivy's big arms were round her at once. . . .

3

Relations between Ivy and Nell had always been a little uneasy. Ivy was tolerant and good-humoured, but could not always hide the contempt which she felt for Nell's refinements, while Nell, though she did not despise Ivy, hated her coarseness—particularly since she could never see it through her own eyes alone, but through others to which it must appear even grosser than to herself.

One evening Nell came in from school, and as she took off her hat before the bit of glass on the kitchen wall, could see the reflection of Ivy munching her tea, which she had started late, after a day's washing. Her sleeves were still rolled up, showing her strong arms, white as milk to the elbow, then brown as a rye-bread crust. Her meadow-green dress was unbuttoned, as if to give her big breast play, and her neck was thick and white, its modelling shown by bluish shadows. "She's a whacker!" thought Nell angrily to herself, then suddenly turned round and said—

"Jerry Sumption's here."

"Lork!" said Ivy, biting off a crust.

"I met him," continued Nell, "and he knows you're going with Seagrim."

"Well, wot if he does?"

"It might be awkward for you. He seemed very much upset about it."

“ Wot fur dud you go and tell un ? ”

Nell sniffed.

“ I didn’t tell him. But your love-making isn’t exactly private.”

“ No need fur it to be.”

“ I don’t know—it might be better for you as well as for us if the whole parish didn’t know so much about your affairs.”

“ And I reckon you think as no one knows about yourn ? ”

Nell flushed—

“ Leave my affairs alone. I’ve none for you to meddle with.”

“ Oh, no—you aun’t sweet on Parson—not you, and nobody knows you go after un ! ”

“ Adone-do wud your vulgar talk,” cried Nell furiously, forgetting in her anger to clip and trim her blurry Sussex speech. “ I’ve warned you about young Sumption, and it aun’t my fault if you have trouble.”

“ There woan’t be no trouble. I’ve naun to do wud Jerry nor he wud me—I got shut of him a year ago.”

All the same, she was not so easy as her words made out. It was evil luck which had brought Jerry Sumption back at just this time. He was bound to be a pest anyhow, though perhaps if his jealousy had not been roused he might have had enough sense to keep away. Now he would most likely come and make a scene. Even though she would not be his girl, he could never bear to see her another man’s ; he might even try to make mischief between her and Seagrim—be hemmed to the gipsy ! At all events he would be sure to come and kick up trouble.

She was partly right. Jerry came, but he did not make a scene. He turned up the next morning, looking strangely dapper and subdued. Ivy interviewed him in the outer kitchen, where she was blackleading the fireplace. It spoke much for the sincerity of his passion

that he had hardly ever seen his charmer in a presentable state—she was always either scrubbing the floor, or cooking the dinner, or washing the clothes, or cleaning the hearth. To-day there was a big smudge of black across her cheek, and her hair was tumbling over ears and forehead, from which she occasionally swept it back with a smutty hand.

Contrariwise, Jerry was neat and dressed out as she had never seen him. His puttees were carefully wound, his buttons were polished, his tunic was brushed, his hair was sleek with water. He stood looking at her in his furtive gipsy way, which somehow suggested a cast in his fine eyes which were perfect enough.

“Ivy . . .”

She had decided that he should be the first to speak, and had let the silence drag on for two full minutes.

“Well?”

“I’ve come—I’ve come to ask you to forgive me.”

“I’ll forgive you sure enough, Jerry Sumption—but I aun’t going wud you no more, if that’s wot you mean.”

“You’ve taken up with another fellow.”

“That’s no concern of yourn.”

“But tell me if it’s truth or lie?”

“It’s truth.”

“And you love him?”

“Maybe I do.”

Jerry’s face went the colour of cheese.

“Then you’ll never come with me again, I reckon.”

“I justabout woan’t”—Ivy sat up on her heels and looked straight into his dodging eyes—“I’ll forgive you all, but I’ll give you naun—d’you maake that out? I cud never have loved you, and you’ve shown me plain as mud as you aun’t the kind of chap a girl can go with fur fun. If you’re wise you’ll kip awaay—we can’t be friends. So you go and find some other girl as ull do better fur you than I shud ever.”

"If there hadn't been this chap——"

"It ud have bin the saum. I'm not your sort, my lad, for all you think."

"Will this other chap marry you?"

"I'll tell naun about un. He's no consarn of yourn, as I've said a dunnamany times."

"Ivy, when I was in France, I thought to myself—'Maybe if I'm sober and keep straight, she'll have me back.'"

"I'm middling glad you thought it, Jerry, fur it wur a good thought. You'll lose naun by kipping straight and sober, so you go on wud it, my lad."

"I don't care, if I can't get you."

"That's unsensible talk. I'm not the only girl that's going—thur's many better."

"Reckon there is—reckon I'll get one for every day of the week. No need to tell me girls are cheap—I only thought I'd like one that wasn't, for a change."

"Doan't you talk so bitter."

"I talk as I feel. You've settled with this chap, Ivy?"

"I've told you a dunnamany times. Wot maakes you so thick?"

He did not answer, but turned away, and walked out of the room with a stealthy, humble step, like a beaten dog. Ivy's heart smote her—she could not let him go without a kind word.

"Jerry!" she called after him. But he did not turn back—and then, unaccountably, she felt frightened.

4

It was odd that Jerry's cowed retreat should have caused her more fear than his swaggering aggression—nevertheless, all that day she could not get rid of her uneasiness, and with the arbitrariness of superstition linked the evening's catastrophe with the earlier foreboding.

She had run down to the Shop, to buy some washing soda, and have a chat with Thyrza, and on her return was met in the passage by Nell, who looked at her hard and said—

“There’s someone come to see you—a Mrs. Seagrim.”

Ivy’s heart jumped. She wished that there had not been quite such a wind to blow about her hair, and that she had had time to mend the hole in her skirt that morning. If Willie’s mother had come to inspect his choice . . . howsumdever, he had often spoken of his mother as a kind soul.

But the woman in the kitchen with Mrs. Beatup was only a few years older than Ivy—a tall, slim creature, with reddish hair, and a beautiful pale face. She was dressed like a lady, too, in a neat coat and skirt, with gloves and cloth-topped boots. Ivy felt the blood drain from her heart, and yet she had anticipated Mrs. Beatup with no definite thought when the latter said—

“Ivy, this is Corporal Seagrim’s wife.”

“Pleased to meet you,” Ivy heard someone say, and it must have been herself, for the next moment she was shaking hands with Mrs. Seagrim.

There was a moment’s pause, during which the two women stared at Ivy, then the corporal’s wife remarked, with a North-country accent that came startlingly from her elegance, that it was gey dirty weather.

“Thicking up fur thunder, I reckon,” said Mrs. Beatup.

“Yo get it gey thick and saft down here, A’m thinking.”

“Unaccountable,” said Mrs. Beatup, and squinted nervously at Ivy.

Ivy’s wits had at first been blown to the four winds, and she sat during this conversation with her mouth open, but gradually resolve began to form in her sickened

heart ; she felt her brain and body stiffen—she would fight. . . .

“ A chose a bad week t’coom Sooth,” started Mrs. Seagrim, “ but ’twas all the choice A had—A hae t’roon my man’s business now he’s sojering. Yo’ mither tells me, Miss Beatup, as nane here knaws he’s marrit. But marrit he is, and has twa bonny bairns.”

“ I know,” said Ivy—“ he toald me.”

“ He toald you ! ” broke in Mrs. Beatup. “ You said naun to me about it.”

“ I disremember. He wur only here the twice.”

Mrs. Seagrim looked at her curiously.

“ Weel, maist folk didn’t sim t’knaaw. A took a room in Hailsham toon, and the gude woman said as how t’Corporal had allus passed for a bachelor man, and was coorting a lass up t’next village.”

“ Maybe she thinks he wur a-courting me,” snapped Ivy, “ but he dud naun of the like. He toald me he was married the fust day I set eyes on un.”

“ Weel, that was on’y reet. So many of those marrit sojer chaps go and deceive puir lasses. A hear there’s been a mort of trouble and wickedness done that way.”

“ Maybe,” said Ivy—“ women are gurt owls, most of them.”

“ And,” continued Mrs. Seagrim, “ it’s only reet and kind of the wives of such men to go and tell any poor body as is like to be deceived by them.”

“ That’s true enough. But your trouble’s thrown away on me. I knew all about un from the fust.”

“ Weel, A’ve done ma duty ony way,” and Mrs. Seagrim rose, extending a gloved hand, “ and A’m reet glad as Seagrim was straight with yo’, when he seems to have passed as single with everyone else.”

“ It must be a tar’ble trial to have a man lik that,” said Ivy. “ He’ll cost you a dunnamany shilluns and pounds if you’ve got to go trapesing after him everywhere, to tell folk he’s wed.”

Mrs. Seagrim smiled.

When Ivy had shown her out of the front-door, she would have liked to escape to her bedroom, but Mrs. Beatup filled the passage.

"Ivy—you might have toald me. I maade sure as he'd deceived you."

"And I tell you he dudn't. He toald me he wur wed, and about his childer, and that dress-up hop-pole of a wife of his'n."

"And you went walking out wud a married man, for all the Street to see!"

"Why not? There wur no harm done."

"No harm! I tell you it wurn't simly."

"He'd no friends in these parts, and a man likes a woman he can talk to."

"He'd got his wife, surelye."

"Not hereabouts. He wur middling sick wud lonesomeness."

Mrs. Beatup sniffed.

"Well, you can justabout git shut of him now. Your faather and me woan't have you walking out wud a married man. So maake up your mind to that."

Ivy muttered something surly and thick—the tears were already in her throat, and pushing past her mother, she ran upstairs.

Once alone, her feelings overcame her, and she threw herself upon the bed, sobbing with grief and rage. Seagrim had deceived her, had meant to deceive her—that was quite plain. Though he had never definitely spoken of marriage, he had quite definitely posed to her as a single man. She gathered from Mrs. Seagrim that he made a habit of these escapades. Lord! what a fool she had been—and yet, why should she have doubted him whom she loved so utterly?

Her hair, matted into her eyes, was soaked with tears, as she rolled her head to and fro on the pillow, thinking of the man she had loved, loved still, and yet hated

and despised. He had played her false—she was unable to get over this fact, as a more sophisticated nature might have done. Her confidence, her devotion, her passion, he had paid with treachery and lies. She had not fought her battle with Mrs. Seagrim in his defence—at least not principally—she had fought it to save herself from humiliation in the eyes of this woman, of her mother, and of Sunday Street.

Yet she cried to him out of the deep—"Oh, Willie, Willie . . ." She thought of him in his strength and grizzled beauty—she remembered particularly his neck and his hands. "Oh, Willie, Willie . . ." She had loved him as she had loved no other man. No other man had filled the day and the night and brought the stars to earth for her and made earth a shining heaven. Her love was crude and physical, but it is one of the paradoxes of love that the greater its materialism the greater its spiritual power, that passion can open a mystic paradise to which romance and affection have not the key. Ivy had seen the heavens open to this clumsy soldier of hers—to this man who had tricked her, bubbled her, brought her to shame.

She wondered if he knew of his wife's visit—perhaps he was with her now. Did he love her? . . . and those two youngsters up in the North—a moan dragged from her lips. His wife was dressed like a lady, but she talked queer, though maybe they all talked like that up North. Had she believed Ivy when she said she had always known Seagrim was a married man? Had her mother believed her? Would Sunday Street believe her?

She sat up on the bed, and pushed the damp hair back from her eyes. She would face them out, anyhow. No one should point at her in scorn—or at Seagrim, either, even though she could never trust him or love him again. She would give the lie to all who mocked or pitied. No one should pry into her aching heart.

Ivy Beatup wasn't the one to be poor-deared or serve-her-righted. She crossed the room, and plunged her face into the basin, slopping her tear-stained cheeks with cold water. Then she brushed back and twisted up her hair, smoothed her gown, and went downstairs with no traces of her grief save an unnatural tidiness.

5

Ivy held her bold front for the rest of that week. Her secret portion of sorrow and craving she kept hid. Her floors were scrubbed and her pans scoured no worse for lack of that glory which makes like the silver wings of a dove those that have lien among the pots. . . . She still had strength to cling to the empty days, to serve through the meaningless routine that had once been a joyous rite.

Everyone had heard about Seagrim now, and had also heard that Ivy Beatup had not been deceived, but had known about his wife from the first. Some believed her, accounting for her silence by the fact that her family would have interfered had they known she was walking out with a married man. These for the most part called Ivy Beatup a bad lot, though her sister-in-law Thyrza stood up for her, declaring Ivy's friendship with the Corporal could only have been innocent and respectable—but of course Thyrza was now allied with the Beatups, and would be anxious for their good name. A large proportion of the street, however, did not believe Ivy's version of the story—they would have her tricked, deluded—betrayed, they hinted—and found an even greater delight in pity than in blame.

All joined in wondering what she would do the following Sunday. She would not have the face to parade the man as usual. Perhaps Mrs. Seagrim was still at Hailsham—perhaps, even if she was not, the Corporal

would not dare show his face after what had happened or, if he did, surely the girl would not be so brazen as to trot him out now that she knew all the parish knew she was a bad lot—or a poor victim.

However, when Sunday came, Ivy appeared in her best blue dress, and on Seagrim's arm, as if nothing had happened. Her eyes were perhaps a little over-bright with defiance, her cheeks a little over-red for even such a full-blown peony as her face, but her manner was assured, if not very dignified, and her grins as many-toothed as on less doubtful occasions.

To tell the truth, Ivy had not meant to offer such a public challenge to a local opinion. She had made up her mind that Seagrim would not appear at all, or in a very subdued condition. However, on Friday she had a letter of the usual loving kind, excusing his absence during the week on the score of extra duty and asking her to meet him at Worge gate next Sunday morning—"with her boy's fondest love" and a row of kisses.

Ivy's teeth bit deep into her lip as she read this letter. He was still deceiving her, though now, thank the Lord, he was also deceived himself. He did not know his wife had been to see her, and doubtless Mrs. Seagrim had now gone back to "the business"—a corn-chandler's in Alnwick. Ivy wondered why she had kept her own counsel, but no doubt the "dressed-up hop-pole" knew best how to deal with her man. If she betrayed her plot it might have led to friction between an affectionate husband and wife, and she probably felt that she had "settled" Ivy.

The girl's blood ran thick with humiliation—both the man and the woman had shamed her. Doubtless they loved each other well, though he, with a man's greediness, had wanted another woman in her absence. He could never have meant to marry Ivy—his intentions must always have been vague or dishonourable. As for the wife, having spent some of the cash left over

from her clothes, in running down South to look after him, she had no doubt been satisfied with warning Ivy and coaxing her husband, and had then gone back to her flourishing shop. True that this letter hardly pointed to the success of her tactics, but Ivy knew too much about men to attach great importance to it—Seagrim was just the sort of man who would have a girl wherever he went, and yet always keep the first place in his heart for the woman who had also his name. She, Ivy, was probably only a secondary attachment to fill the place of the other, and no doubt in that other's absence, he would make every effort to keep her—but she was a stop-gap, an interlude, to him who had been her all, and filled the spare moments of one who had filled her life.

She forced herself to bite down on this bitter truth, and swallowed it—and it gave her strength for the course she meant to take.

She found Seagrim leaning against Worge gate, sucking the knob of his swagger stick, and gazing at her with shining long-lashed eyes of grey. For a moment the sight of him there, his greeting, the husky tones love put into his voice, his sunburnt, hawk-like strength, all combined to make her falter. But she was made of too solid stuff to forget his callous deception of her, which he still maintained, drawing her arm through his with a few glib lies about extra duty and the sergeant. Contempt for him stabbed her heart and eyes, and for a few moments she could neither look at him nor speak.

They went to their usual parade ground, marching to and fro between the Bethel and the Shop, and Ivy's confidence revived with her defiance of public opinion. "They'll see I doan't care naun fur wot they think," she said to herself, and met boldly the outraged eyes of Bourners and Sindens and Putlands. It was a hot day, and there was a smell of dust in the air, which

felt heavy and thick. The sun was dripping on Sunday Street, making the red roofs swim and dazzle in a yellow haze ; the leaves of the big oaks by the forge drooped with dust, and the Bethel's stare was hot and angry, as if its lidless eyes ached in the glow.

Ivy decided that she might now end her ordeal of the burning ploughshare. She had strutted up and down a dozen times in front of her neighbours, defying their gossip, their blame and their pity. " I done it—now I can git shut of un," and her gaze of mixed pain and contempt wandered up to his brown face as he walked beside her, talking unheard in his booming Northumberland voice.

" It's middling hot in the Street—let's git into the spinney."

He kindled at once—it would be good to sit with her on trampled hazel leaves, to lie with their faces close and the green spurge waving round their heads in a filter of sunlight. Usually these suggestions came from him, by the rules of courting, but he loved her for the boldness which could break all rule even as it lacked all craft. He slid his hand along her arm, and pressed it, with joy at the quiver she gave.

The Twelve Pound spinney stood about thirty yards back from the Street, behind the Bethel, and was reached by a little path and a stile opposite the Horse-lunges. As they passed the inn, Ivy saw Mrs. Breathing opening the door and the shutters for the Sunday's short traffic, and at the same time saw ahead of her a dusty khaki figure ambling towards the sign with the particular padding unsoldierly tread of Jerry Sumption.

" He's on the drink, now's he knows as he can't git me," she thought—" the bad gipsy ! " Then a feeling of regret and hopelessness came over her. Here were two men whose love she had muddled—one who had hurt her and one whom she had hurt. Was love all hurting and sorrow ? For the first time the careless

game of a girl's years became almost a sinister thing. Her hand dragged at Seagrim's arm, as if unconsciously and despite herself her body appealed to the man her soul despised . . . then she lifted her eyes, and looked into Jerry's as he passed, trotting by with hanging head and queer look, like a mad dog . . . yes, love was a tar'ble game.

The black, still shadows of Twelve Pound Wood swallowed her and Seagrim out of the glare. The clop of hoofs and bowl of wheels on the Street came as from a great way off, and the hum of poised and darting insects, thick among the foxgloves, seemed to shut them into a little teeming world of buzz and pollen-dust and sun-trickled green. Seagrim stood still, and his arm slid from the crook of Ivy's across her back, drawing her close. But with a sudden twisting movement she set herself free, standing before him in the path, with the tall foxgloves round her, flushed and freckled like her face, and behind her the pale cloud of the bennet heads like melting smoke.

"Kip clear of me, Willie Seagrim—I'll have no truck wud you. I've met your wife."

The man, slow of speech, gaped at her without a word.

"Yes. She caum round to our plaace three days agone, and shamed me before my mother. But I said I knew as you wur married, and to-day I walked out wud you to show the foalkses here I aun't bin fooled. Now I've shown 'em, you can go. I'm shut of you."

"Ivy—yo're telling me that my Bess——"

"Yes—your Bess, wud gloves and buttoned boots and——" She checked herself. "Yes, she caum, and tried to put me to shaum. But I druv her off, surelye, and now I'm shut of you, fur a hemmed chap wot fooled me wud a lie."

"But A no harmed yo'——"

"Harmed me!"—she gasped.

"Dom that Bess for a meddlesome fule. Oh, she's gey canny, that Bess. But Ivy, li'l Ivy, yo'll no cast me off for that?"

"Why shud I kip you?—you've bin a-fooling me. You maade as you wur a free man, and all the while you wur married. I—I loved you."

"And yo' kin lo' me still . . ." He sought to take her, but she pushed him off.

"Reckon I can't. Reckon as I'll never disremember all the lies you've said. And you spuk of loving me . . . knowing all the whiles . . . Oh, you sought to undo me! Reckon I'm jest a gurt trusting owl, but it wur middling cruel of you to trick me so."

"Ivy—by God A sweer——"

"Be hemmed to your silly swears. I'll never believe you more."

"But yo'll no cast me off fur a wumman up North . . ."

"I don't care where she be. She's yourn—and you hid her from me. If you'd toald me straight, maybe I—but . . ."

"Yo' na speered of me. Why should A have spoken?"

"You did spik—you spuk as a free man."

"A was a fule—yo' made me mad for you."

His eye was darkening, and the corners of his mouth had an angry twist.

"You toald me as extra duty kept you away last week," continued Ivy, "and it wurn't—it wur your wife. Reckon you love her and I'm only a girl fur your spare days. You'd kip me on fur that."

"A'll keep yo' on for naething. If yo' don't like me, yo' can go."

"It's you who can go. I'm shut of you from this day forrard. You git back to Hailsham this wunst and never come here shaming me more."

"Yo'll be shamed if I go. Better for yo' if I stay."

"If you stay you'll shaum me further, fur you'll

shaum me wud my own heart. Git you gone, Willie Seagrim, and find a bigger fool than me."

He shrugged his shoulders, and her heart sickened with jealousy, knowing that her loss to him could not be so serious as his to her, since he had his beautiful pale Bess, with her red hair and stooping back, whom all the time he had loved more than he loved Ivy, because she was his children's mother and had rights which he respected. He would soon forget Ivy; perhaps he would find another girl to solace his spare hours, but anyhow he would forget her. The thought almost made her hold him back, cling to him, and seek to wrest him from the other woman with her self-confident possession. But she was withheld by her sense of outrage, and by a queer pride she had always had in herself, a rustic straightness which had gone with her through all her many amours. To surrender now could only mean disgrace, since she felt that in some odd way it meant surrender to Bess as well as to Bess's master. If she became Seagrim's woman, which she must be now, or nothing, Bess would somehow triumph, and triumph more utterly than if she threw him off with scorn. Besides, he had fooled her and lied to her; he was not worth having—let him go, though her heart bled, and her bowels ached, as she watched him march off away from her, shaking his shoulders in jaunty swagger, the sunlight gleaming on his grizzled hair, the curls she had loved to pull. She could have called him back, and he would have come, but her lips were shut and her throat was dry. He vanished round a bend of the path, and all that was left of him was a crunching footstep, heavy on last year's leaves. Then that too was gone, and with a little moan Ivy slid down among the foxgloves and bennets, and sobbed with her forehead against the earth.

6

After a little while she pulled herself up and wiped her eyes. Her head ached and Twelve Pound Wood was blurry with her tears. The sun struck down upon her back, baking, aching, mocking her with the thick yellow light in which the flies danced and the pollen hung. She wanted to creep into the shade.

But she must go home and save her face. It was dinner-time, and she must join her family with her old bravery, or they would suspect her humiliation. She rose to her feet, smoothed her dress, dusted off the bennet flowers and goose-foot burrs and the rub of pollen from the foxgloves, pushed back the straggling hair under her hat, wiped her eyes again, and hoped the stains and blotches of her weeping would fade before she came to Worge. Then she set out for the opening of the wood. A man's shadow lay across it, though she could not see him as he stood behind an ash-stump. Her breathing became shallow, and her heart thudded. . . . He had come back, to find her in her weakness—he was waiting for her. . . . No, it was not he, this smaller man, crouched like a fox against the stump.

"Jerry," she cried, as she turned the elbow of the path, and met him face to face.

He was drunk ; his eyes showed it with their gleam of bleared stars, his flushed cheeks and dark swelled veins, his hair hanging in a fringe over his brow, his mouth both fierce and loose. . . . He lurched towards her, and she just managed to brush past him, tumbling ungracefully over the hurdle that shut off the wood. He must have just come, for he had missed Seagrim—he might have stumbled over her as she lay and cried among the grasses.

She did not fall as she jumped the hurdle, but her ankle turned, making her stagger, and by the time she

could right herself, Jerry stood before her, blocking the way to the Street. Then she saw for the first time that he had a hammer in his hand. Ivy gave a loud scream, and darted sideways, scrambling through the hedge into Twelve Pound field. Jerry was after her, without a word, no longer the furtive, padding animal she had despised, but the armed and terrible beast of prey that would kill and devour the foolhardy huntress who had roused him. She staggered up the field, too breathless to cry, but he drew even with her in a few strides, and grabbed her by the arm.

"Stop, Ivy, and say your prayers. I'm going to kill you."

She could not speak, for her throat was dried up. Jerry's eyes were more of a threat than his word. They were on fire—his skin was on fire—liquor and madness had set him alight; and in his hand was a hammer to hammer out her brains. She could neither cry to his mercy nor appeal to his reason—her physical powers were failing her, and both mercy and reason in him had been burnt up.

He gave her a violent push, and she fell on her knees.

"That's right. Say your prayers. I'm a clergyman's son, and you shan't die without asking pardon for your sins. I saw you go into the wood with him, as you wouldn't with me . . . I'll kill you quick, you shan't have any pain . . . I loved you once, I reckon."

He swung up the hammer, but he was too drunk to take aim, and the action woke her out of the trance of fear into which he had plunged her. She felt something graze bruisingly down her hip—then she was scrambling on her feet again, rushing for the hedge.

The hedge of Twelve Pound field is a thick hedge of wattles and thorn. Ivy, too mad to look for a gap, tried to force her way through it. Her head and arms stuck, and she heard Jerry running. Then at last loud screams

broke from her—scream after scream, as he seized her by the feet and pulled her backwards through the brambles, leaving shreds of blue gown and yellow hair on every twig. He pulled her out, and flung her rolling on the grass; then the hammer swung again. . . .

But the field was full of shoutings and voices, of feet trampling round her head. Then two hands came under her armpits, dragging her up, and she saw her father. She saw her brother Harry, looking very green and scared, and last of all Jerry plunging in the lock of two huge arms, which gripped him powerless and belonged to the Reverend Mr. Sumption.

"Take her away," said the minister. "I'll keep hold of the boy."

"I wouldn't have hurt her," moaned Jerry. "I'm a clergyman's son—I'd have killed her without any pain."

"Come hoame, Ivy," said Mus' Beatup, and began to lead her away.

"Is it dinner-time?" asked Ivy stupidly.

Harry gave a nervous guffaw.

"I'll be round and see you, neighbour," said Sumption, "soon as I've got this poor boy safe."

"'Pore boy' indeed!" grunted Mus' Beatup. "'Pore boy' as ud have bin murdering my daughter if Harry and I hadn't had the sperrit to break your valiant Sabbath in the Street field. Look at his gurt big murderly hammer."

"He would not have used it—for the Angel of the Lord led me to him, and it was the Angel of the Lord who saved both him and the girl, despite your Sabbath-breaking."

"Then the Angel of the Lord can saave him another wunst—when I have him brung up for murdering. Come along, do, Harry."

Jerry was silent now, nor was he struggling. He looked suddenly very ill, and as Ivy stumbled blindly

down the field on her father's arm, she had a memory of his drawn white face lolling sideways on the minister's shoulder.

7

Two-edged disgrace struck at Ivy both at home and in the village—for the double reason of Jerry's assault and Seagrim's parade. The latter was almost the wickedest in the Beatups' eyes, for it had the most witnesses—the former had no witnesses but themselves and Mr. Sumption, though when Mus' Beatup led Ivy home, Mus' Putland was already climbing the stile and Mus' Bournier running out of his door. It could be hushed up, muffled and smoothed, whereas the whole Street had seen Ivy in her flaunt of wedded Seagrim—"A bad 'un," "a hussy" she would be called from Harebeating to Puddledock.

"'Tis sent for a judgment on you," said Mrs. Beatup. "If you hadn't gone traipsing and strutting wud that soldier, I reckon as gipsy Jerry had never gone after you wud his hammer."

"I wurn't a-going to show 'em as I minded their clack," sobbed Ivy against the kitchen table—"I said as 'I'll taake him out this wunst, just to show 'em I aun't bin fooled, and then I'll git shut of un.' And I dud, surelye."

"And a valiant fool you're looking now, my girl—run after and murdered, or would have bin, if your father hadn't a-gone weeding the oats and heard your screeching. Reckon as half the Street heard it at their dinners. We'll have the law of Minister and his gipsy."

So they would have done, had it not been brought home to them that "the law" would hoist them into that publicity they wanted to avoid. If Jerry were tried for attempted murder, all the disgraceful story of Ivy and Seagrim would be spread abroad, not only throughout Sunday Street and Brownbread Street and

the other hamlets of Dallington, but away north and south and east and west, to Eastbourne, Hastings, Seaford, Brighton, Grinstead, and everywhere the *Sussex News* was read.

So the Beatups agreed to forgo their revenge on condition that the Rev. Mr. Sumption took Jerry away for the few days remaining of his leave, and did not have him back at the Horselunges on any future occasion.

"You can't hurt my boy without hurting your girl," he told them, "so best let it alone and keep 'em apart. I'm sorry for what's happened, and maybe Jerry is, and maybe he's not. I reckon Satan's got him."

"Reckon he has," said Mrs. Beatup spitefully, "and reckon when Satan gits childern it's cos faathers and mothers have opened the door. 'Tis a valiant thing fur a Christian minister not to know how to breed up his own young boy. But the shoemaker's wife goes the worst shod, as they say, and reckon hell's all spannelled up wud parsons' children."

"Reckon you don't know how to speak to a clergyman"—and the Rev. Mr. Sumption turned haughtily from the wife to the husband, who was, however, big with an attack on Sunday observance, and no discussion could go forward till he had been delivered of it.

In the end the matter was settled, and the parting was fairly friendly. The Beatups had a queer affection for their pastor mingled with their disrespect, and admired his muscle if they despised his ministrations. The proceedings ended in an adjournment to the stables, where Mr. Sumption gave sound and professional advice on a sick mare.

Poor Ivy felt as if she could never hold up her head again. The very efforts she had made to avoid contempt had resulted in bringing it down on her in double

measure. Garbled stories of her misadventure ran about the Street. It was said that she had been walking out with two men at once, that Seagrim had jilted her because of Jerry and Jerry tried to do her in because of Seagrim. There were other stories, too, some more creditable, and some less—and they all found their way to Worge, where they provoked the anger of her father, the querulousness of her mother, the shrinking contempt of Nell, and the loutish sniggers of Harry and Zacky.

Ivy was not a sensitive soul, but the Beatup attitude was warranted to pierce the thickest skin. The family could not let the matter drop, and kept it up even after those outside had let it fall into amiable "disremembering." Ivy's exuberant correspondence with the forces, her amorous past, her scandalous future, all became subjects of condemnation. Her people did not mean to be unkind, but they nagged and scolded. Perhaps the balking of their revenge on Jerry Sumption made them specially unmerciful towards Ivy—she had to face the torrent of the diverted stream. She had disgraced them as, apparently, none of Mus' Beatup's muddled carouses or gin-logged collapses had done. The fine, if beer-blown, flower of the Beatups had been hopelessly picked to pieces by her wantonness and indiscretion. Nell was perhaps the most really vindictive of the lot (for Mus' Beatup was easy-going and Mrs. Beatup loved her daughter through all her reproaches), because she saw in Ivy's disgrace another danger to her hopes. She had enough odds against her in her poor little reedy romance without all the spilth of Ivy's bursting thick amours to come tumbling over it, choking out its life. Ivy's village friends turned against her too, for Polly Sinden was still trying to live up to Bill Putland, and Jen Hollowbone of the Foul Mile remembered the theft of Kadwell and taunted "Sarve her right." Thyrsa, her sister-in-law, was still friendly, but though

Ivy liked Thyrza, there had never been any real confidence or comradeship between them—the elder girl was too quiet, too settled, and had always been lacking in that indefinite quality which makes a woman popular with her own sex. Ivy did not respond to Thyrza's few tentative efforts, made, she suspected, out of pity, and a sense of duty to Tom. Besides, her trouble had soured for the time even her own sweet honest heart, and the sight of Thyrza secure of a man's love and an even more wonderful hope, smote her with an unbearable sense of her own failure and loneliness.

For the worst of all that Ivy had to bear was her love for Seagrim, still alive, though wounded and outraged. Her old gay interest in young men, her comradeships and correspondences, had faded out and could occupy her no more. Her heart was full of a mixed dread and hope of meeting him again. Sometimes when the purple chaffy evenings drew down over the fields, and the smell of ripening grain and ripening hops made sweet sick perfume on the drowsy air, an ache which was almost madness would drive her out into the lanes, seeking him by the tall stile at Four Wents, where he would never come again. The fiery horn of the moon, the jigging candles of the stars, would glow out of the grape-coloured sky as she went home through a fog of tears, slipping and stumbling in the ruts, dreaming of his step beside her and his arm about her and his bulk all black in the dimness of the lane. . . . Then suddenly she would hate him for all he had made her suffer, for all the lies he had told her and all the truths, for the kisses he had given her and the tears that he had cost her—and the hate would hurt more than love, choke her and burn her, make her throw herself sobbing and gasping into bed, where the hunch of Nell's cold shoulder and the polar stars that hung in the window joined in preaching the same lesson of loneliness.

Then one day she made up her mind quite suddenly

to bear it no longer. "If you have much more of this you'll go crazy," she said to herself, "—so git shut of it, Ivy Beatup."

9

Ivy's disappearance was not found out till late in the evening. In spite of the dejection and heartache of the last week, her failure to appear at supper with a healthy appetite was an alarming sign. It was now remembered that no one seemed to have seen her all the evening. Mrs. Beatup burst into tears.

"She's chucked herself into the pond, for sartain-sure. You've bin so rough wud her, Maaster—you've bruk her heart, surely."

"I rough wud a girl as has disgraced us all! I've took no notice of her a dunnamany days."

"That's why, I reckon. You've bruk her heart. Git along, Harry, and drag the pond, and doan't sit staring at me lik a fowl wud gapes."

"Maybe she's only gone into Senlac to see the pictures."

"And maybe she's only run away wud that lousy furrin soldier of hern."

"I tell you she's drowneded. I feel it in my boans. She's floating on the water lik a dead cat. Go out and see, Harry! Go out and see!"

Zacky began to howl.

"Adone, do, mother!" cried Harry. "You're the one fur the miserables. Reckon Ivy's only out enjoying herself."

"I'd go myself," sobbed Mrs. Beatup, "but my oald legs feel that swummy. Oh, I can see her floating, all swelled up!"

During this scene Nell had slipped out of the room. She was now back in the doorway, saying icily—

"You needn't worry. Ivy's taken all her clothes with her."

The family took a little time to get the drift of her words.

"All her clothes!" murmured Mrs. Beatup faintly.

"Yes—in the pilgrim-basket, so you may be sure she hasn't drowned herself."

"She's gone away wud that dirty soldier!" cried Mus' Beatup. "That justabout proves it."

"It doan't," said his wife. "Ivy's an honest girl."

"An honest girl as walks out wud a married man fur all the Street to see, and then goes and gits half murdered by a gipsy!"

"A clergyman's son," corrected Mrs. Beatup. "And it wurn't her fault, nuther. Our Ivy may be a bit flighty, but she's pure as the morning's milk."

"Whur's she gone, then? She'd nowheres to go. You doan't know the warld as I do, and I tell you she's gone wud un, and be hemmed to her. We're all disgraced and ull never hoald up our heads agoun."

"I woan't believe it."

"You're an obstinate oald wife—I tell you it'll be proved to-morrer."

"How?"

"I'll go to the camp myself and find out. If Seagrim's gone too, then it's proved."

The family went to bed convinced, except for Mrs. Beatup—who kept up a mulish belief in her daughter's honesty—that Ivy had run away with Seagrim.

The next morning Mus' Beatup set out for Hailsham to make enquiries. But he had not been fitted by nature for a diplomatic visit to a military camp—all he did was to fall foul of various sentries and nearly get arrested. In the end he found himself back in the road, with nothing gained except perhaps the fact that he was not in the guard-room. He felt as if the whole British Army were in league against him, the accomplice of one Corporal in his crimes, and was scanning the scenery for a public-house when he heard the sound

of marching feet, and a file came tramping up the road, commanded by Seagrim himself.

Mus' Beatup straddled across his way.

"Who are you? Stand clear!" cried the Corporal, while the file marched stiffly onwards.

"Whur's my daughter?"

"Stand clear—or A'll have you put under arrest."

"I want my daughter—Ivy Beatup."

"Halt!" cried Seagrim to the file, which had now marched a discreet distance ahead. "A don't know owt of your daughter. A've not clapped eyes on her sine Sunday week."

"She's run away."

"A don't know owt."

"You don't know where she is?"

"A don't know owt. Quick march!" and off went he and his file in a cloud of dust, leaving Mus' Beatup furious and confounded.

"He's a militaryist," he mumbled, "a hemmed militaryist—treating me as if I wur pigs' dirt. That's wot we're coming to, I reckon, wot Govunmunt's brung us to—militaryists and the pigs' dirt they spannell on. Ho! there'll be a revolution soon"—and he floundered up the road towards Hailsham where the sign of the Red Lion hung across the way.

10

Jerry Sumption knew nothing of Ivy's disappearance, for the morning after that fatal Sunday his father had taken him off to Brighton, and from Brighton he had gone back to France. In fact his whole notion of the affair was hazy—inflamed by one or two unaccustomed glasses of bad whisky and the memory of Ivy on Seagrim's arm, he had rushed and stumbled through what seemed to him now a wild nightmare of phantasmagoria from which he had waked into aching and disgrace.

He was sullen company during those few days at Brighton. Mr. Sumption had chosen Brighton because it was at a safe, and also not too expensive, distance from Sunday Street. Moreover, he hoped it would provide some distraction for Jerry. The financial problem had been great, but he had solved it by drawing out the whole of his savings. He took a poor little lodging at the back of the town, from which he and Jerry travelled down daily by 'bus and tram to the diversions of the sea-front.

It was not a quite successful holiday, which was indeed hardly to be expected. Mr. Sumption brought preachment to bear on Jerry's sullenness—he did not understand what a hazy impression the catastrophe had made, and that to him, though not to Ivy, the scene by Twelve Pound spinney mattered less than that earlier scene in Forges Field. Also Mr. Sumption's ideas of amusement were not the same as his son's. He decided to risk the Lord's displeasure and visit a Picture Palace for Jerry's sake, but was so scandalised by what he saw that he insisted on leaving after half an hour's distress.

"Surely it is the house of Satan with those red lights," he exclaimed with sundry cracks and tosses.

"What's the matter with red lights? You get 'em in a forge."

"But a forge is the place of honest toil—and a kine-ma's but a place of gaping and idleness and worse: three hundred folks got together to see lovers kissing, which is a private matter."

Jerry laughed bitterly.

"Three hundred folk gaping at an ungodly picture, who might be saving their souls. I tell you, boy, there ull come a red day, that ull burn redder than any forge or picture-house, and all the ungodly gazers shall be pitched into it like weeds into the oven, and only the saints escape—with the singeing of their garments."

"Oh, Father, do speak cheerful. I'm that down-hearted."

"Reckon you are, my poor lad—and the Lord rebuke me if I add to your burden. This looks a godly sort of a pastry-cook's. Let's go in and get some tea."

The next day was the last of Jerry's leave, and the one that he and his father spent most happily together. Mr. Sumption's ideas of entertainment seemed quite hopeless to Jerry, but during those last hours he felt drawn closer to the being who he knew was the only friend he had. They spent the morning on the pier, listening to the band, and in the afternoon went by the motor-bus to Rottingdean—a trip so surprisingly expensive that there was no money left to pay for their tea, and while the other excursionists sat down to long tables, they had to wander upon the down, whence they watched the feasters, Jerry like a forlorn sparrow and Mr. Sumption like a hungry crow, till it was time to go home.

But all the while the minister could see his son growing more dependent on him, and in his heart he thanked the Lord. His delight at having won that much poor show of affection blinded him a little to the pathos of the outlaw clinging to his only prop, before he was flung to troubles and dangers which he realised in helpless foreboding. The chapel weed clung to the chapel stone before it was rudely torn up and thrown out to the burning.

Their final parting was abusive, owing to Mr. Sumption's having left Jerry's dinner of sandwiches behind at their rooms, but the father would always have a thankful memory of that evening when Jerry had been simple and grateful and rather childish, and had listened to his good advice, and had not interrupted with his cry for cheerfulness the stream of Calvinistic warning.

They had sat by the big ugly window of their room, looking out at the first dim stars pricking the sky above Kemp Town. Jerry's eyes were full of a mysterious trouble as they pondered the new serenity of his father's face.

"Father," he said suddenly, "you'll watch and pray that Satan don't get me."

"Satan can't hurt the elect."

"But maybe I'm not one of the elect. Didn't seem like it on Sunday, did it?"

"That was the Lord's trial sent to us both—He delivered you unto Satan for a while that you might find His ways."

"Reckon His ways are not for my finding."

"I will pray for you, my dear."

"Father, you promise, you swear, as you'll never let me go? I sometimes feel as if there was only you standing betwixt me and hell. Reckon you're the only soul in all the world that cares about me."

II

By the time Mus' Beatup had groped his stumbling way from Hailsham to Sunday Street, the anxieties of Worge about Ivy were at an end. A letter had come during the morning and was flapped in his face. He was not sober enough to read it, nor yet too drunk to have it read to him.

"8 Bozzum Square,

"Hastings.

"Dear Mother,—I hope this finds you well as it leaves me at present. I got fed up as the boys say and came here. Do you remember Ellen Apps and her folk lived at the Fowl Mile up the Hollowbones. She is here working on the trams, I heard from Jen, so thought I go and ask her. She says I will get a job in a day or

2 with my strong physic, so do not worry about me, I am with Ellen and hope start work next week. Having no more to say, I will now draw to a close. Fondest love from

“ Your loving daughter,

“ IVY.”

“ I toald you as she'd never gone wud Seagrim ! ” cried Mrs. Beatup.

“ Umph,” grunted her husband—“ but she's gone on the trams, which is next bad to it. Now if she'd gone maaking munitions. . . . ”

“ Trams is better than munitions.”

“ No it aun't. Fine ladies and duchesses maake munitions, but I never saw a duchess driving a tram.”

“ Ivy ull never drive a tram—she'd be killed, surelye.”

“ Best thing she cud do for herself now she's disgraced us all—a darter of mine on the trams, a good yeoman's darter on the trams . . . 'tis shameful.”

“ But 'tis honest, Maaster—better nor if she'd run away wud a man.”

“ Maybe—but 'tis shameful honest. I'm shut of her ! ”

“ Oh, Ned !—our girl ! ”

“ Your girl ! ”

“ You cruel, unnatural father ! ”

“ Adone do, and taake off my boots.”

The matter ended temporarily in sniffs and grunts, but when Mus' Beatup woke out of the sleep which followed the removal of his boots, he reviewed it more auspiciously. After all, working on the trams was better than working in the fields—suppose Ivy had gone and offered her robust services to some neighbouring farmer, to some twopenny smallholder perhaps, then the yeoman name of Beatup would have indeed been trampled into the earth. Now trams were town work, trams were war work, trams were engineer-

ing. In time "my darter on the trams" began to sound nearly as well as "my son at the front."

So a letter was written in which Ivy's choice was deplored, though not condemned. She was invited to come home, or if obstinate on that point, to turn her attention to the more aristocratic "munitions," but if it must be trams, then trams it should be unreplored.

Ivy wrote back in a few days, saying that she had "joined up" and enclosing a photograph of herself in uniform. She would soon be earning thirty shillings a week, and had taken a room of her own in Bozzum Square. Her family had now quite forgiven her, especially as they found the neighbourhood inclined to applaud rather than to despise Beatup's daughter on the trams. Her mother would have liked her home, but Ivy was quite firm about sticking to her job. "I'm best away from the Street as things are, and I'll send you five shillings a week home, and you can get a girl with that and what you save from my keep." But it would have taken two girls to make a real substitute for Ivy.

Mrs. Beatup, besides the gap in her motherly feelings, missed her terribly about the house. Her sturdy willingness to scrub or clean, her cheery indifference to the little indelicacies of emptying slops or gutting chickens, her unfailing good-humour and bubbling vitality, the rough, tender comfort she gave in hours of sorrow, all made Ivy of a special, irreplaceable value in her mother's working-day. Nell refused to give up her "teaching," and spoke obstinately of indentures, and other irrelevant puzzles. Anyhow her squeamishness—she even washed the dishes with a wrinkled nose—and the delicacy of her small soft hands would make her pretty useless in hen-house or kitchen. Mrs. Beatup began to talk of Ivy as much as she thought of her, and soon her family came to find her more of a nuisance now she was away than she had been at home in her most disruptive moments.

However, her forgiveness was complete, and the reconciliation was celebrated by a solemn ride in "Ivy's tram" by all the Beatups. It was during the summer holidays, so Nell was able to go—Mrs. Beatup wore her Dionysian bonnet, and her husband his best Sunday blacks, Harry and Zacky were scrubbed and collared into oafishness, the house was shut up and left in charge of Elphick and Juglery, as it had never been since Tom's wedding.

"Ivy's tram" was on the line from the Albert Memorial to Ore, and ground its way through dreadful suburbs up Mount Pleasant, past the decayed "residences" of Hastings' prime, slabbed with stucco and bulging with bow-windows, now all grimed and peeled and darkened, chopped into lodgings and sliced into flats, not the ghost of prosperity but its rotting corpse.

The tram ground and screamed and swished on the rails, and Ivy, rosy-faced under her tramwayman's cap—with its peak over the curl that hid her ear—came forcing her way up the inside for fares, taking from each Beatup its separate penny. She looked exuberantly well, and quite happy again; she also smelled strongly of tram-oil, and Nell's little nose wrinkled even more than when she had smelt of soap-suds and milk. She had a cheery word for each one of her family, who in their turn sat abashed, holding their tickets stiffly between finger and thumb, their eyes slewed on Ivy as she took other passengers' fares, answered their questions, trundled them out, bundled them in, pulled the bell, ran up to the roof, changed the sign, and flung a little good-humoured chaff at Bill the motorman when they reached the terminus.

She had no time off till late that evening, so when the family had ridden in state to Ore, they rode back again to the Memorial. The parting was a little spoiled by the crowd which was waiting to board the tram and

reduced Mrs. Beatup's farewell embrace into something grabbing and unseemly.

" Good-bye, mother dear, and doan't you vrother. I'm valiant here. . . . Full inside, ma'am, and no standing allowed on the platform. . . . Now, Nell, take care of mother and hold her arm—she's gitting scattery—and adone, do, mother, for there's too many fares on the top, and I'm hemmed if I haven't bitten a grape out of your bonnet."

12

It was night before the dislocations of train and trap brought the Beatups back to Worge. A big yellow moon was swinging high, scattering a honey-coloured dust of light on the fields and copses and little lanes. The farms, hushed and shut, lay dark against their grain-fields drooping with harvest—in some fields the corn was already cut and shocked, each tasselled cone standing in the moonlight beside the black pool of its shadow.

The Beatups were silent—owing perhaps to their congestion in the trap. Nell was tired, and leaned against her mother. Life seemed a very sordid trip, in spite of the honey-coloured moon, which swung so high, the type of unfulfilled desire. Mrs. Beatup was thinking of Ivy and wondering if the soles of her boots were thick enough ; and Zacky, wedged between them, planned a big hunt for conkers the next day. On the front seat, Mus' Beatup sucked at his pipe and schemed a dash for the Rifle Volunteer before closing time. " If the War goes on much longer, there'll be no more beer, so I mun git wot's to be had. It's those Russians, and be hemmed to them ; reckon they'll maake peace and never care if the War goes on a dunnamany year. It's the sort of thing you'd expect of chaps wot went tee-total by Act of Parliament."

Harry drove the old gelding, and as the trap lurched

from farm to farm he marked those which had cut their grain, and which had not. They had reaped the Penny field at Cowlease, and the old bottoms of Slivericks stood shocked beside the stream. Egypt Farm, with late hardy sowings, had not started—Worge started to-morrow.

That visit to Hastings had been a holiday before the solemn business of the year. For a long time he had planned his reaping—trudging the fields each day, fingering the awns, rubbing the straw. He must not cut too early or too late. Last year the oats had stood till they shed their seed, this year they must be caught in just the right moment of wind and sun.

On the whole the crops promised well. The old grounds of the Volunteer and the Street field had borne splendidly—the ploughed grass-lands not so well, except for Forges field, which, for some obscure reason, had brought forth a rich yield from its sour furrows. On the whole the wheat promised better than the oats, which in spite of the varieties he had chosen had thickened in the clays, and grown unwieldy with sedge leaves and tulip roots.

The problem of harvesting had worried him for a long time, for Mus' Beatup absolutely refused to buy a steam reaper-and-binder; he wurn't going to take no risks in war-time, and Harry must make what shift he could with the old horse machine, which had trundled slowly round the few acres of earlier Worge harvests, and must even trundle round the width of this new venture. In vain Harry pointed out the labour needed for binding—he must get help, that was all; the family would turn to, as it always did in harvest time. The absence of Ivy was a hard blow—for she practically did the work of a man—but he found an unexpected substitute in the curate, who with the other country clergy had been episcopally urged to lend a hand in harvest time. Mr. Poulett-Smith had watched young Beatup's

effort with an approval which condoned his wobblings between Church and chapel, and felt, moreover, that his help might send a balance down on the Church side. He was a little scandalised to find soon after that Harry had also drawn in the Rev. Mr. Sumption—the curate's offer put it into his head ; besides, it was just the sort of thing one asked of Mr. Sumption—it seemed far more his job than preaching or praying.

The other helpers would just be the family, this time including Nell, for where her parson went she could go also, in spite of stained and weltd hands. Elphick and Juglery could do about one man's work between them, and there was a boy over school age on the loose in the village, who was hired for ten shillings and his meals.

Harry had written to Tom and told him of his maturing plans, but either his marriage had breached him from Worge, or the fact that the disciple had gone so much further than his master had made his anxious ardour cool away. His latest communication had been a field postcard, which, as he had forgotten to put a cross against any of its various items, presented a bewildering and conflicting mass of information, which Harry flipped into the coals with a wry smile.

However, he was able to stand alone, for he dared the chances of his new deeds. Oafish as he looked in his Sunday suit and gasper collar, the adventure of harvest was upon him as he jolted the old trap home under the moon. " Behold, the fields stand white to harvest " . . . the words drifted like a cloud over his brain. These fields that he had prepared, that his plough had torn and his harrow broken, were fields of battle like the fields in France. On them he had fought, for the same reason as Tom fought the Germans, all the treacheries and assaults of nature, her raiding winds, her storming rains, her undermining rottenness in the soil, her blasting of thunder and choking of heat.

"Reckon to-morrow's our Big Push," he said to his father, rather proud of the metaphor, and was careful that the old horse did not hurry stablewards too quickly, lest they should be home before the closing of the Rifle Volunteer, and lose a soldier thereby.

13

The next day broke out of a dandelion sky above Harebeating, but before the first pale colours had filtered into the white of the east, Harry was on his legs, pottering in the yard. All the little odds of farm-work must be done early, to leave him free for the day's great doings. He anxiously snuffed the raw air—could its moisture, distilled in the globes that hung on thatch and ricks, be the warning of a day's rain? The barometer stood high, but, like other Sussex farmers, he had learned to distrust his barometer, knowing the sudden tricks of turning winds, the local rains drunk out of the marshes, the chopping of the Channel tides. He disliked the flamy look of the sky, the glassiness of its reflection in the ponds . . . he thought he felt a puff from the south-west. "O Lord," he prayed, kneeling down behind the cowhouse door, "doan't let it rain till we've got our harvest in. If faather loses money this fall, he'll never let me breake up grass agaun. Please, Lord, kip it fine, wud a short east wind, and doan't let anyone stay away or faather go to the Volunteer till we've adone. For Christ's sake. Amen."

Feeling soothed and reassured, he went in to break-fast.

The family was of mixed and uncertain mood.—Mrs. Beatup was "vrothering" about what she could give the clergymen for dinner—"not as I care two oald straws about Mus' Sumption, but Mus' Smith he mun be guv summat gentlemanly to put inside." Zacky was crossly scheming how best to carry through the

conker plan which Harry had rather threateningly forbidden. Nell was in a nervous flutter, her colour coming and going, her little hands curling and twitching under the table. Mus' Beatup was given over to an orgie of pessimism, and before breakfast was finished had traced Worge's progress from a blundered harvest to the auctioneer's.

"There's too many fields gitting ripe together," he said drearily. "You shudn't ought to have maade your sowings so close. Wot you want now is a week's fine weather on end, and all your wark done on a wunst. You'll never git it, surely—the rain ull be on you before it's over. Reckon the Sunk Field ull have seeded itself before you're at it. You shud ought to have sown it later."

"It's fine time to think of all that now."

"I've thought of it afore and agaun, but you'd never hearken. You think you've got more know than your faather wot wur a yeoman afore you wur born and never bruk up grass in his life."

"There's Mus' Sumption," cried Mrs. Beatup, looking out of the window. "He's middling early—reckon he wants some breakfast."

She reckoned right. Mrs. Hubble of the Horselunges had refused to get breakfast for her lodger at such an ungodly hour, and he had prowled round fasting to the Beatups, eyeing their bacon and fried bread through the window.

"The labourer is worthy of his hire," he remarked as he sat down to the table, "and thou shalt not muzzle the ox which treadeth the corn. . . ."

After breakfast they all went out to the Volunteer field, which was to be cut first. Harry took charge of the reaper, with Zacky a scowling protestant at the horse's head, while the others turned to the sickling and binding. Mr. Poulett-Smith had not arrived, having first to read Mattins and eat his breakfast, but

he came about an hour after the start, a tall, bending, monkish figure, feeling just a little daring in his shirt-sleeves.

The meeting of the two parsons was friendliest on the Anglican side. Mr. Poulett-Smith was a good example of the Church of England's vocation "to provide a resident gentleman for every parish"—besides, he pitied Sumption. The fellow was so obviously misfitted by his pastorate—a fanatical, ignorant Calvinism, blown about by eschatological winds, was his whole equipment; otherwise, thought the curate, he had neither dignity, knowledge, nor education. He would have been far happier had he been left a blacksmith, had his half-crazy visions been allowed to burn themselves out like his forge fires, instead of being stoked by mistaken patronage and inadequate theological training. As things stood, he was absurd, even in no worthier setting than a forgotten village Bethel—a mere caricature of a minister, even in the pulpit of the Particular Baptists, an old-fashioned and fanatical sect with their heads full of doomsday. But here among the reapers he was splendid. His open shirt displayed a neck strong and supple and plump as a boy's—the grey homespun was stuck with sweat to his shoulders, and the huge muscles of his back showed under it in long ovoid lumps. His years had taken nothing from his strength, merely added to his solidness and endurance. With his shock of brindled curls, his comely brown skin, his teeth white as barley-kernels, and eyes bright and deep as a hammer pond, and all the splendour of his body from shoulder to heel, he was as fine a specimen of a man as he was a poor specimen of a minister. Mr. Poulett-Smith paid him the honour due to his body, while seeing no honour due to his soul.

Mr. Sumption felt his physical superiority to the willowy, tallow-faced curate; indeed he had a double advantage over him, for he felt a spiritual towering too.

He despised his doctrines of Universal Redemption and Sacramental Grace just as much as he despised his lean white arms and delicate features. He gave his hand a grip that made him wince—he could feel the bones cracking under the pressure . . . “He keeps his hands white that he may hold the Lord’s body,” he thought to himself.

The day was hot and misty. The blue sky glowed with a thick, soft heat, and a yellowish haze blurred hedges and barns. Even the roofs of Worge seemed far away, and the sounds of the neighbouring farms were dim—but distant sounds came more clearly, a siren crooned on the far-off sea, and the mutter of guns came like a tread over the motionless air. Harry heard it as he drove the reaper, mingling with the swish of sickles and the rub of hones.

For greater quickness, he had split the field into two unequal parts—the bigger one he was cutting with the reaper, the smaller was being cut by hand. Mr. Sump-tion, Mus’ Beatup and Elphick reaped, while Nell, the curate, Juglery and the boy from Prospect Cottages bound the sheaves. The old horse went so slowly that the sickles worked nearly as fast as the machine. After a time Harry gave up his place to his father, who had been unfitted by illness and intemperance for much strenuous work.

At first there was some talking and joking among the harvesters, but soon this wore to silence in the heat. Only from where Mr. Smith and Nell stooped together over the reaped corn, gathering it into sheaves, came murmurs of sound. Nell’s pale cheeks and lips were flushed with her toil and stooping, and her eyes were bright with a pleasure which toil cannot give. Her cotton dress, the colour of the sky, set out the brightness of her hair, the colour of the corn. Her graceful, ineffectual hands, too, pleased the curate, for they were the only pair besides his in the field which were not

coarse and burnt, with stubbed, black nails. Moreover, her pleasure and excitement at the day's long promise made her more talkative than usual, and to a better purpose. He found that he liked her pleasant, blurry voice, which fled and fluttered over her words for fear that she should drawl them.

The sun climbed to the zenith, and the heat not only baked down from the sky, but scorched up out of the ground. The dust of the earth and of cornstalks filled the air with a choking, chaffy thickness. The smell of dust came from the road, and from farmyards the smell of baking mud. The black oasts of Egypt across the way swam in a cloud of heat, and the red oasts of Worge were smeared to shadows in the steam of sunshine and dust. An aching of blue and yellow was in the harvesters' eyes, and their bodies seemed to melt and drip. The reaper crawled even more slowly, with Mus' Beatup sagging drowsily over the reins, and Zacky drooping against old Tassell, whose flanks ran with sweat, and from whose steaming hide came ammoniacal stable smells, whiffing over the harvesters every time he passed.

Mr. Poulett-Smith looked more than ever like a Sienese candle now that his forehead and cheeks were dabbled with sweat, like wax that had melted and run. He wiped his face periodically with a white handkerchief, which annoyed Mr. Sumption, though it was a fact that the curate had done excellent work, and made up in conscientious energy what he lacked in muscle and experience.

"Take off your waistcoat, or your sweat ull spoil the lining," called the minister, and Mr. Smith rather unexpectedly followed his advice, having, as it happened, quite lost sight of the pastor in that huge toiling figure, now almost bare of chest, with arms swinging like a flail. He saw only a labourer more experienced and a man more manly than himself, whose muscle he respected and whose commands he would obey.

From twelve o'clock onwards the problem for Harry had been to keep Mus' Beatup away from the Rifle Volunteer. The field being near the Street, they could hear the pleasant jar of stopping wheels, the slam of the taproom door, even the creak of the Volunteer sign. As he swung out there over the Street, with his grey-green uniform and obsolete rifle, he seemed to say, "In my day yeomen never worked at noon, but came and drank good beer made of Sussex hops and talked of how we'd beat the French. . . . Now there is no good beer, and hardly any Sussex hops, and we talk of how we and the French together will beat the Germans. But come, good yeomen, all the same."

Harry thought it advisable to detach Mus' Beatup from the reaper, which trundled him up under the eaves of the Volunteer's huge sprawling roof, so he suggested that old Juglery should take his place for a while, and that Mus' Beatup should help with the binding. He also persuaded Mr. Sumption to give up his sickle and bind till closing-time. He felt that if his father worked between the two parsons he would not be so likely to scuffle an escape; for in spite of his rationalist enlightenment, Mus' Beatup's attitude in the presence of the clergy was very different from that which he took up in their absence—and his contempt of their doctrine was liable to be swallowed up in respect for their cloth.

Dinner was brought out soon after noon by Mrs. Beatup and the girl, a hard-breathing young person with a complexion like an over-ripe plum. There was beer, and there was tea, and bread and cheese—Mrs. Beatup's idea of summat gentlemanly to put inside the clergymen materialised in several crumbly sandwiches of tinned curried rabbit. They all sat down under the hedge furthest from the Volunteer, and were all rather silent, except Mr. Sumption, who had scarcely tired himself with the morning's work and thought this a

good opportunity to enter into an argument, or "hold a conference," as he put it, with Mr. Poullett-Smith on the doctrine of Efficacious Grace. Mr. Smith, besides the reluctance of his Anglican breeding to discuss theology with an outsider, and his feeling as a public-school man that it was bad form to talk shop in mixed company, was far from theologically minded. Though he would not have owned it for worlds, he was already tired out. The continual stooping with the hot sun on his back had made him feel sick and dizzy, and Mrs. Beatup's curried sandwiches had finished the work of the sun and roused definite symptoms of an indelicate nature. He lay against the hedge, looking languid and curiously human in his open shirt, his hair hanging a little over his forehead. Nell sat on her heels, and her eyes played over him tenderly, almost maternally.

"Reckon you're tired," she said in a low, drawling voice that no one else could hear.

They did not go back to work till nearly two, and the danger for Mus' Beatup was over for the time. The afternoon was, as usual, more tiring than the morning, for the earth, if not the sun, was hotter, limbs were tired and stomachs were full. Harry mounted the curate on the reaper, though he was not much of a success, as he failed to realise the power of old Tassell's habit, and did vigorous rein-work at the corners, with the result that the old horse was thrown completely off his bearings, and on one occasion nearly charged down the hedge, on another knocked over Zacky, and once came wearily to a standstill with all four feet in the uncut corn.

Mr. Poullett-Smith decided that he preferred binding to reaping, and was glad to find himself back beside Nell with her delicate ways—it was wonderful, he thought, how far she was above her surroundings; he had not noticed it before, for he had hardly ever seen her against the background of Worge, but in the frame

of church or school, where her shining was not so bright. She was tired, he could see, but she did not grow moist and blowsy like the rest—her pretty hair dragged a bit, her mouth drooped rather sweetly, but exertion heightened her anæmic tints, and there was a glow about her when she talked, in spite of her fatigue.

Suddenly, in the middle of the afternoon, she broke away from him, and came back with a glass of water.

"Is that for me?" he exclaimed, as she held it out.

"Yes. I thought you must be getting thirsty."

"I am—but aren't you thirsty, too?"

"I had something to drink in the house—this is yours," and she watched him drink with an eager sweetness and humility in her eyes.

14

For the next two or three days the work went well. The Volunteer Field was reaped, and then the Street Field; the Sunk and Forges must be tackled before the fine weather came to an end, but the low grounds by Bucksteep might be left to stand a little, being sheltered, and not quite ready for harvest. Harry's mixed gang of helpers was a bigger success than he had dared hope. Mr. Sumption was even better the second day than the first, having worked down a stiffness which his big muscles had acquired from long disuse. Even Mrs. Beatup was impressed, and gave him a fine breakfast every morning. The other clergyman was not so useful, but he made up in effort what he lacked in achievement, and by Friday was doing quite a creditable day's work. Nell was not, of course, much good, still, she was better than nothing, and more energetic and good-humoured than Harry had ever seen her. Zacky and the hired boy conspired in laziness and evil-doing, and Harry was grateful when the

Rev. Mr. Sumption took it upon himself to knock their heads together.

On Friday evening grey smears of cloud lay on a strange whiteness in the west, and on Saturday the whole sky was smudged over with a pale opacity, and the wind blew from the South. The labourers found relief from the stewing, chaffy stillness of the last few days ; but Harry snuffed the air and looked wise.

"The weather's breaking up," he said to his father in the dinner-hour. "We'll have to work on Sunday."

"Wud two passons !" cried Mus' Beatup. "They'll never coame. They'll be preaching tales about dead men."

"Reckon we must do wudout them. We durn't leave the Sunk Field till after the weather. Bucksteep can wait, surelye, but the Sunk must be reaped before the rain."

Mus' Beatup groaned—"That's the wust of doing aught wud passons. 'Tis naun to them if it rains on Monday—all they care is that a dunnamany hunderd years agoe it rained forty days and forty nights and drownded all the world saave Noah and his beasts. Bah !" and Mus' Beatup spat into the hedge.

However, to their surprise, they found both the parsons ready to work on Sunday. Mr. Poulett-Smith had no less authority than the Archbishop of Canterbury—the Archbishop quoted Christ's saying of the ox in the pit, and gave like indulgence to all Churchmen. The Rev. Mr. Sumption appeared with no such sanctions.

"I've got no Randall Cantuar or Charles John Chichester to tell me I may break the Lord's commandments. Reckon the Assembly ull be against me in this, and the Lord Himself ull be against me ; but I'll risk it. For you're a good lad, Harry Beatup, and I'm going to stand by you, and if the Lord visits it on me I must bow to His will."

When service-time came he had the advantage, for he polished off his bewildered congregation in only a little over half an hour, whereas the curate was nearly two hours at Brownbread Street, with a sung Eucharist. "I can say what I like and pray what I like," said Mr. Sumption. "I'm not tied down to a Roman Mass-book dressed-up Protestant."

Mr. Smith heard him in silence. His respect for him as a man and a labourer still outweighed his contempt for him as preacher and theologian. Also he now felt that in matters of religion Mr. Sumption was slightly crazed. He could handle a horse or a hammer or a sickle with sureness and skill, and talk of them with sanity and knowledge, but once let him mount his religious notions and he would ride to the devil. Mr. Smith came to the conclusion that he was one of those crack-brained people who believed that the war was the end of the world, the Consummation of the Age foretold in Scripture, and that soon Christ would come again in the clouds with great glory.—This really was what Mr. Sumption believed, so Mr. Smith did not misjudge him much.

By noon on Sunday dark clouds were swagging up from the south-west, with a screaming wind before them. The fog and dust of the last few days had been followed by an unnatural clearness—each copse and field and pond and lane in the country of the Four Roads stood sharply out, with inky tones in its colouring. The fields sweeping down from Sunday Street to Horse Eye were shaded from indigo almost to black, and on the marsh the slatting water-courses gleamed like steel on the heavy teal-green of their levels. The sea was drawn in a black line against a thick, unhealthy white sky, blotched and straggled with grey.

"It'll rain before dusk," said Harry. "It can't hoald out much longer."

"We'll never git the field shocked, let alone brought

in," said Mus' Beatup. "Here we've bin five hour and not maade more'n a beginning—it's lamentaable. Reckon we might as well let the Germans beat us—we cudn't have wuss weather."

Harry set his teeth.

"We'll git it finished afore the rain."

"Afore your grandmother dies," jeered Mus' Beatup

"I'm off to the Volunteer."

And leave us. . . . Faather ! "

"I'm not a-going to stay here catching my death wud rheumatics, working in the rain under my son's orders. Reckon you'd sooner see me dead than lose your hemmed oats—my hemmed oats I shud say—but I—" and Mus' Beatup swung up his chin haughtily—"have different feelings."

"Reckon you have, and you ought to be ashaumed of yourself!" cried Harry thickly, then flushed in self rebuke, for on the whole he was a respectful son.

Mus' Beatup sauntered away, his hands in his pockets, his shoulders hunched to his ears—his usual attitude when he felt guilty but wanted to look swaggering. Mr. Sumption and Mr. Poulett-Smith were both at the further end of the field, and no opposition stood between him and the Rifle Volunteer save the doubtful quality his wife might offer from the kitchen window. Harry watched him with burning cheeks and a full throat. "Reckon I'm lik to kip temperance all my days wud this," he mumbled bitterly.

He then went down to the other workers, and told them that it was going to rain and that they were a labourer short, as his father was feeling ill and had gone indoors to rest, but that he hoped by "tar'ble hard wark" to get the field cut before the storm. "If the grain's shocked, it'll bear the rain, but if it's left standing, the rain ull beat down the straw, and all the seed ull fly. Juglery, you taake the reaper—Norry Noakes, you git to Tassell's head—Mus' Sumption and

Elphick and I ull reap, and Mus' Smith and Nell and Zacky bind. . . . Now I reckon 'tis a fight 'twixt us and them gurt clouds over Galleybird."

Elphick and Juglery were inclined to grumble at having their dinner-hour cut short, and talked of judgments equally bestowed on "them wot bruk the Sabbath" and "them wot bruk up grass." But Mus' Sumption's professional opinion was that the approaching storm was not in the nature of a punitive expedition—"If the Lord had wanted to spoil this harvest, He would have done it on Thursday or Friday; now all He'll get is the tail-end, and not that if I can help it."

He bent his huge back to the sickle, and worked for the next hour without straightening. Mr. Poulett-Smith decided to forget the Sunday-school he was supposed to catechise at three, and Nell to forget the headache which would probably have sent her off the field at the same hour. Norry Noakes and Zacky, seeing their deliverance nigh, put more energy into that afternoon than they had put into all four other days of harvest—Norry nearly dragged Tassell's head off his neck in his efforts to make him go faster.

At about three o'clock, Mr. Sumption stood up and scanned the fields under his hand like Elijah's servant watching for rain. Then he gave a shout that made everyone start and straighten their backs.

"Lo! the Lord is on our side—behold more labourers for the harvest."

Two figures were coming down the field from Worge—Ivy Beatup and a soldier. Ivy wore a pink cotton dress, belling out all round her with the wind and flapping against the soldier's legs. She also carried unexpectedly a pink parasol.

"Thought I'd come over and see you all!" she bawled as soon as she was within earshot. "This is Sergeant Eric Staples from Canada."

. . . Canada ! Then no doubt he knew a bit about harvesting. Harry went forward to meet them.

"Mother toald us you'd half the Sunk to reap before the weather," said Ivy, at closer range, "so I said we'd come and give you a hand, surelye."

"We'll be unaccountable glad to have you both—the rain's blowing up and we're short of workers."

"I'm on it, as the boys say, and so's the Sergeant, I reckon."

"Sure," said Sergeant Staples, staring round him.

"Mother's gitting a valiant supper fur us when 'tis all a-done. She says if you've bruk the Sabbath one way you may as well break it another and maake a good job of it. Thyrza's coming, and is bringing all her tinned salmon. Wot do you think of my sunshade, Nell?—reckon it's unaccountable smart," and Ivy threw it down into the stubble and began rolling up her sleeves.

"It's middling kind of you," said Harry politely to Sergeant Staples.

"Only too glad—I've done a power of this work over in Sask. May I ask what that little buggy is?"—and he pointed to the nodding erection of old Juglery chaired above the reins that slacked on Tassell's rump.

"That's the reaper, surelye."

The Canadian did not speak, but the puzzled look deepened on his face.

"Maybe you'll taake a sickle, being handy-like?"

"Sure"—but when Harry gave him Mus' Beatup's discarded weapon he held it at arm's length and scratched his head. Then he slid up to Ivy—

"Say, kid, I never heard before as in the old country they cut corn with a pocket-knife."

However, he swung his tool handily, and with the two new workers, and the extra energy of the old, the reaping went forward at a pace which threatened the victory of those black clouds over Galleybird.

The wind blew in droning gusts, swishing in the corn, and fiddling in the boughs of Forges Wood. Dead leaves began to fly out of the wood, the threat of autumn. The men's shirts blew against their skins, and the women's skirts flew out; the colours of the field grew dim—the corn was white, the wood and the hedges were grey—only the clothes of the harvesters stood out in smudges of pink and blue. Then suddenly rain began to squirt down out of a black smeary sky like charcoal—the wind screamed, almost flattening the few last rods. No one spoke, for no voice could be heard above the howling of the wind. Rabbits began to pop out of the corn, but there were no hunting dogs, no shouting groups from the cottages come out to see the fun. When the last sickleful had been cut, and the reaper stood still, with old Juglery asleep on the seat, the harvesters picked up their coats and pulled down their sleeves without a word.

They were wet through—the muscles of the men's bodies showed through their clinging shirts and the women were wringing their gowns. But the Sunk Field was reaped and Harry's harvest saved. He had won his battle against his own ignorance, his father's indifference, and the earth's treacheries. He had vindicated his daring, and he would never know how small was the thing he had done—a few scrubby acres sown and reaped, a few mean quarters of indifferent grain gathered in—he would never hear Sergeant Staples say to Sergeant Speed of the North-West Provinces that he had spent a slack afternoon cutting mustard and cress with a pocket-knife.

Food was waiting up at the farm, with Thyrsa Beat-up, who, for obvious reasons now, had been unable to help with the harvest, but had done her best by contributing her entire stock of tinned salmon to the harvest-supper. The party began to move off, Mr. Poulett-Smith wrapping his coat over Nell's shoulders

with hands that perhaps strayed a little to touch her neck. Only Mr. Sumption was left, standing upright and stockish on the rise of the field, a huge black shape against the sky.

"Come along, Mus' Sumption," called Ivy, "and git a nice tea-supper. Thur's tinned salmon and a caake."

Mr. Sumption's voice came to them on the scream of the wind—

"Shall I go without thanking the Lord of the Harvest for His mercies in allowing us to gather in the fruits of the earth on the Sabbath Day?"

"He's praying," said Nell, with a shiver of disgust in her voice.

The curate bit his lip.

"He's perfectly right," he said, and going up to the minister, he knelt down in the stubble. The others huddled in a sheepish group by the gate. Mr. Sumption's prayer was blown over their heads, washed into the woods on the rain, but they could hear the groan of his big voice in the wind, and here and there a word of his familiar prayer-vocabulary. . . . "Lord . . . day . . . oven . . . wicked . . . righteous . . . Satan . . . save . . . forgive. . . . Amen."

PART V

NELL

I

AUTUMN came, and gradually the farm-work slackened. The Bucksteep acres were cut, not much the worse for the storm—the hops were picked, and showed a fair crop of fuggles, though the goldings had not done so well. Harry sowed catch crops of trifolium and Italian rye grass, and started his autumn ploughings. Certain reactions had seized him after the harvest, and he had gone off wandering in the fields, away to villages where he had not strayed for months except to market. But the lapse had been short, for the adventure of Worge's acres was not dead—his imagination had now its headquarters and sanctuary in the fields where he worked; he had no need to seek dreams and beauty far away, for they grew at his barndoor, and he strawed them in the furrows with his grain.

Tom's dwindling zeal was reawakened by the account of the harvest which Harry scrawled to France—"Nine quarters we got from the Volunteer Field and five from the Sunk and six from Forges. Hops and roots did middling. All the potash fields were valiant. Maybe next year Father will buy a reaper-and-binder. The Reverend Mr. Sumption was proper at the harvest." His brother wrote back a letter of which "Well done, young 'un" was the refrain. "Queer," he wrote, "but there's a Forges Wood out here—they say the 5th Sussex named it and it was called something French."

before. It is not like Forges, for it is narrow like a dibble and the trees have no branches, being knocked off by crumps and nothing grows there becoss of the gas. There are dead horses in it."

Tom had seen plenty of fighting that autumn in Paschendaele, but was so far well and unhurt. He sent Thyrza home a bit of shell which had knocked off his tin hat and "shocked him all of a swum." Everyone, he wrote, had laughed fit to bust at it—Thyrza thought that they laughed at queer things in the trenches. She fretted a little during those autumn days, for her hope was now almost a torment . . . suppose Tom should never see the child their love had made. Every day in the paper there were long casualty lists, every day telegraph boys and girls went peddling to happy homes and blasted them with a slip of paper. They had knocked at doors in the country of the Four Roads—the eldest Pix had been killed early in October; then there had been the butcher's son at Bodle Street, and the lawyer's son at Hailsham, and poor Mus' Piper's boy had lost both legs. . . . The world looked suddenly very grey and treacherous to Thyrza; she dared not hope, lest hope should betray her, and her few moments of peaceful mother-happiness were riddled with doubts. Oh, if only God would let her have Tom back somehow, no matter how maimed, how helpless, how dependent on her. . . . Then she would suddenly react from her desire, shrink back in horror at the thought of Tom wounded, his strong sweet body all sick and disfigured. . . . "Better dead," she would groan—and yet, a dead father for her child. . . . She found war a very tar'ble thing.

During the earlier years she had, in company with most people in the country of the Four Roads, passed lightly under its yoke. Even her widowhood had not brought it down upon her—Sam had so often left her, might so easily have come to grief in other ways. Except for those who were actually and poignantly bereaved,

the War made little difference to a large multitude for whom it existed only in France and in the newspapers. For a big section of England it did not begin till 1916, for it was not till then that it actually set foot on English soil. In 1916 the Conscription Act, the food scarcity, and War Agricultural Committees dumped it down on the doorsteps of Sussex folk who up till then had ignored it as a furrin business. Thyrza had not thought about it much—she had read the newspapers, and given little bits of help to war charities that appealed to her ; but now that it had taken the man she loved, it had taken her too. She was tied with him to its chariot-wheels, one of the nameless victims of the great woe.

Her business, too, fretted her. She was not able for the exertions of the times, and was worried by the difficulty of getting supplies. To have no sweets for the little children who came in with their pennies, no tea for the old men and women who wanted it to warm and cheer their poor rheumatic bodies, no cheese and no bacon for the young men who worked in the fields . . . all this grieved her gentle heart, and she brooded over it in a way she would not have done had she been in her usual health. She grew pale and nervous, found she had but little to say to lingering customers, sat huddled limply over her fire, rising slowly and heavily when the buzz of the little bell that used to be so gay forced her to exert herself and go to the door.

In this state, Mrs. Beatup took pity on her, and forgot the tacit warfare of the mother on the wife. If Thyrza was going to give a child to Tom, she was also going to give a grandchild to Tom's mother. She often waddled down to the shop with good advice, or asked Thyrza up for an evening at Worge, and developed a new and unexpected optimism for her comfort.

" Reckon if Tom's alive he'll stick alive to the end—if he'd bin going to be killed he'd have bin killed afore now. Besides, he always wur the chap fur luck. I

remember how when he wur a liddle feller he slid into the pond, and we all thought he'd be drowneded, but Juglery pulled him out, and his faather hided him nigh out of his skin. So doan't you vrother, my dear, but kip in good heart fur the saake of the liddle 'un wot's coming. Tom ull live to see un, I can promise you. He sims unaccountable young to have a baby, but reckon he'd be younger still to die."

2

If that autumn was cruel to Thyrza in its torture of waxing hope it was crueller still to Nell in its torture of hope's dying. For a week after the harvest she had lived in flowery fields of memory, pied with all bright colours. When she shut her eyes she could see his face bending close to hers over the shocked corn, his thin delicate hands moving among the straw, sliding close enough to hers for an accidental touch . . . she could feel them brush her neck as he helped her into his coat at the day's end of prayer and storm. . . .

For a week her heart drowsed in its own sweetness. Nell was happy, she grew gentler and kinder. She was no longer an ineffective little rebel, full of disgusts and grumbles—a delicious languor was upon her, a bright dimness which veiled all the jags and uglinesses of her life. During this week she did not see Mr. Poulett-Smith, but her mind rested sweetly in his memory. Perhaps the physical fatigue of the harvest, mixed with the natural inertia of her anæmic condition, both had a share in bringing about a certain passivity, or perhaps it was the change of her love from scourge to comfort which put an end to all her old restless efforts to see him, her making of opportunities, her fretting glances from the schoolhouse window, her nervous strayings to church. Anyhow she did not see him till Sunday, when her glorious castle fell.

He came into Sunday-school as usual, with a bene-

dictory smile. Her memories of him in his open shirt, with his face all red and shining and his hair caked with sweat on his forehead, made her feel a little shocked to see him again in his long black cassock, above which his face showed waxy and white. Perhaps a touch of sunburn lingered, but the black of his priestly garment wiped it out. Who would have thought, said Nell to herself, that this day a week ago he had been toiling as a farmhand, with bare arms and throat, all baked and burnt and dirty and sweaty . . . ?

He greeted the superintendent, and talked for a few moments at her desk ; then he came down among the teachers and their classes. Nell wore a white blouse and a big white hat like an ox-eyed daisy. Her book slid from her knee to the floor, and there was a scuffle among her children as Freddie Gurr from Hazard's Green dropped the worm he had been nursing for comfort through the chills of his mediæval Sunday ; but she did not hear as she half rose for her greeting, then sank back, as in the level, indifferent tones in which he had said " Good morning, Miss Sinden—good morning, Miss Pix," he said " Good morning, Miss Beatup," and passed on to " Good morning, Miss Viner."

Nell's heart constricted with pain. She told herself that she was a fool to be so sensitive, that it was not likely Mr. Poulett-Smith would greet her publicly in the manner of their harvest friendship. But she could get no comfort from her self-rebuke, for deep in herself she knew that she was wise. Doubtless there was no importance to be attached to the coldness of her friend's greeting. Nevertheless, he had that morning, silently and symbolically, declared the gulf between them. In the cornfield, working as her comrade, he had stood for a short while on her level—for the first time her efforts to attract him had been without handicap. But now the handicap was restored—he was the Priest-in-Charge of Brownbread Street, and she was the daughter of a

drunken farmer. If for a few hours she had charmed him out of his eminent sense of fitness, the charm was over now. What had this dignified, cassocked ecclesiastic to do with her, a poor little nobody? His friendliness during their common toil had been a mere passing emotion; probably she had exaggerated it—even the little her memory held must be halved, and that poor remainder cancelled out by the probability that he had forgotten it.

As a matter of fact the curate had not forgotten it, but the attraction had not been robust enough to survive the loss of its surroundings. He saw that he had been unwise and rather unkind in yielding so easily to a mere temporary prepossession. His more solid affections had long been engaged elsewhere, and he spent some hours of real self-reproach for having ever so briefly faltered. He might have put ideas into the girl's head—they had certainly been in his own. However, he reflected, there was not time to have done much harm, and he would set matters straight at once. So for the next month his behaviour to Nell was unflaggingly cold and polite, and at the end of it all the parish was told of his engagement to Marian Lamb.

3

There were days of desolation for Nell Beatup that November. Her disappointment gripped her as a black frost grips the fields; she felt powerless, bound, and sterile. Even the last month, when bit by bit her happy memories were destroyed, when she learned that all her hopes were built on an exaggeration, a mistake, even that month of slow disillusion had been better than this black month of despair. In October a few crumpled leaves had reddened the trees, a few pale draggled flowers had sweetened the garden, a bird had sometimes perched on the gable end and sung before he flew away. But now the fields were black and the woods were *dun*;

the lanes were a poach of mud, and the smell of mud hung above field-gates and barns—a clammy mist rose from the ponds, making the air substantial with the taste of water . . . tears . . . they seemed to hang in the rainy clouds, to dribble from the trodden earth, and, mixed with the dead summer's dust, they made a grey slimy mud that sobbed and sucked under her feet on her daily trudge to school.

The killing of her hope was no mercy. Even that sick thing had been better than this emptiness, this death. Hope had sustained her for years, for years she had had nothing more robust to feed on than her pale infatuation for a man who seldom gave her crumbs. She had become skilled in hoping, long practice made her an experienced artificer of hope, able to build a palace out of a few broken bricks. She had never known any other love than this ghost of one, so there had never been a chance of its dying of comparison. She had no intimate girl friends, and Ivy's full-blooded affairs struck her only with the grossness of their quality, giving her own by contrast a refinement and poetry that made it doubly precious.

Then had come the wonderland of those harvest days, when hope had almost passed into confidence, when all the wonderful things of love she had never learned yet—glamour, pride, perfection, satisfaction—had shown her their burning shapes. But it had all been false, a mirage of that same hope's sick intensity, an overreaching of the artificer's skill; and now her tears had turned to mud the golden dust of harvest, and all her dreams were dead—and stuck to her still, clogging and fouling, like this mud of Slivericks Lane on her boots.

Luckily, her daylong absence made it possible for her to hide her wretchedness from her family. At school her listlessness was commented on—a listlessness alternating with an increased nerviness and a tendency to cry when found fault with—but as Nell had always been a little

languid and a little hysterical, these exaggerations of her natural state were put down to her health, and the schoolmistress persuaded her to take a patent medicine containing iron. Her love affair had been conducted on such delicate lines that only a few had noticed it, and no one except Ivy had given it any importance. Ivy was intensely sorry for her sister, and on one Sunday's visit dared to probe her state. But Nell was like a poor little cat caught by the tail, and could only scratch and spit, so Ivy good-naturedly gave up the effort. She was quite her old self again, judging by the "pals" she brought over to Worge on her Sundays off—Motorman Hodder and Motorman Davis, and Sergeant Staples, and Private La Haye, and Corporal Bunch of the Moose Jaws, and other Canadians quartered at Hastings, who sat in the kitchen, saying, "Sure" and "Yep" and "Nope."

"Reckon it's kill or cure wud you," said Mrs. Beatup, and no one knew precisely what she meant.

Nell thought her worst moment would be when she delivered to Mr. Poulett-Smith the pretty little speech she had been making up ever since she heard of his engagement. It was fairly bad, for Marian Lamb was with him and had already assumed a galliard air of proprietorship.

"Thank you so much, Miss Beatup—it's awfully kind of you. Yes, I'm awfully happy, and"—coily—"I hope Harry is too. But we mustn't stop any more—Harry has still the remains of his cold. *Do* turn up your collar, you naughty boy."

Nell walked away rigid with contempt. "She's silly and she's vulgar—she's vulgarer than I, for all I'm only a farmer's daughter. 'Naughty boy!'—how common! She's worse than Ivy."

Miss Marian gave up her Red Cross work, and was seen going for long walks with her Harry, and accompanying him on his parish rounds. She was a big, ungainly, soapily clean female, with a certain uncouth

girlishness which did not endear her to the curate's flock. Nell could not imagine what he "saw in her"—she certainly did not read the *Sermons of St. Gregory*. She wondered if he had loved her long—the parish said "years," but that he had been unable to propose (1) till an expected legacy arrived, (2) till Miss Marian was sure she could get nobody else. At all events, he must have been in love with her during those days of Nell's mirage—it was another bitter realisation for her to swallow, another choking mouthful of humble-pie.

The poor little teacher crept about forlornly. She had not officially given up her Sunday-school class, but she seized flimsy pretexts to keep away; she even sometimes stayed away from church—then would force herself to go thrice of a Sunday, in case her absence should be put down to its true cause. She dodged the curate and Marian in the lanes, but she seemed to run into them at every corner—they always seemed to be going by the schoolhouse window. One evening, as she passed Mr. Smith's cottage by the church, she saw the firelight leaping in his uncurtained study, and two dark figures stooping together against the glow. She stopped and stared in, like a beggar watching a feast; the table was laid for tea, and there were his books and his pictures, all ruddy in the firelight, the flickering, shuttled walls of the little room in which she had never set foot—his home. Marian was there; she would pour out his tea and hand him his cup. She would say, "Eat some more, dear; you've had a tiring day." Then she would make him lie back in his armchair and put his feet to the fire, and she would curl up at his feet and read him the *Sermons of St. Gregory*. . . . No, she wouldn't do anything like this. Nell laughed—that woman was Nell, not Marian. She was putting herself where she wanted to be, in the other's place. Marian would say, "Don't eat all the cake, naughty boy." And then she would go and sit on his knee. Ugh! . . . And Nell, who would have done so

differently, stood outside in the November dusk, with tears and rain on her face, and little cold, red hands clenched in impotent longing.

4

At the end of November the bells rang for the advance at Cambrai—old Dallington tower rocked with its chimes, and even the little tin clapper at Brownbread Street tinkled away for an hour or more. Mr. Poulett-Smith and his organist spent half a dozen evenings trying to make a dodging choir face a Solemn Te Deum approved by the Gregorian Society. Unluckily, the singers who would have easily blustered through Stainer in F or Martin in C, grew hang-dog and discouraged in the knots of Tones and Mediations, so that by the time the Te Deum was ready, Bourslon Wood had been evacuated by the British and the victory of Cambrai became something perilously near a fiasco. Fortunately the capture of Jerusalem soon afterwards saved the Te Deum from being wasted.

These alternating victories and disasters were very bad for Mus' Beatup, for he celebrated them all in the same way at the Rifle Volunteer. The only difference was that from some obscure sport of habit he celebrated a victory in gin and a defeat in whisky. He was very bad after both aspects of Cambrai, and Jerusalem brought him to ruin.

Soon after nine there was a loud knocking at the back door, rousing all the Beatups who had fallen asleep in the kitchen. Nell was asleep because she always seemed to be tired and drowsy now, Mrs. Beatup was asleep because she reckoned she wouldn't have much of a night with Maaster, Zacky and Harry were asleep on the floor in front of the fire, curled up together like puppies—Zacky because it was long past the time he ought to have been in bed, Harry because

he had had a hard day ploughing the clays. There was great confusion and rubbing of eyes, and the knock was repeated.

"Go and see who it is, Nell," said Mrs. Beatup. "Harry, I dreamt as we wur being bombed by Zepperlians like the folk at Pett."

"I dreamt of naun—I'm going to sleep agaun."

He dropped his head back against Zacky—and just at that moment Nell reappeared in the doorway, with a terrified face.

"Mother—it's father; he's been hurt. . . ."

"Hurt!—you mean killed. . . ."

"I don't—I mean hurt. There's a man with him, helping him in."

"I'm a-going," and Mrs. Beatup seized the lamp and waddled out, followed by her scared and sleepy offspring.

In the passage a big soldier was propping up a Mus' Beatup who looked as if he was stuffed with sawdust.

"He's had a bit of a fall," said the soldier as he staggered under his burden. "I was seeing him home like, and he slipped in the yard."

"I reckon every boan in his body's bruk," said Mrs. Beatup—"that's how he looks, surelye. Let him sit down, poor soul."

Mus' Beatup slid through the soldier's arms to a sitting posture on the floor. Harry pushed forward and offered to help carry him into the kitchen.

"Someone ud better go fur a doctor," said the escort. "I don't like the look of him."

Mrs. Beatup held the lamp to her husband's face, and Harry at the same time recognised the soldier as the eldest Kadwell from Stilliands Tower—not he who had loved and ridden away from Jen Hollowbone, but another brother in the Engineers. Mus' Beatup's eyes were open and dazed, his mouth was open and dribbling, and his limbs were dangling forlornly. When they

tried to pick him up, they found that his right leg was broken.

"Zacky—run up to Dallington and fetch Dr. Styles this wunst," ordered Harry. "Tell him it's a broken leg—he'll have to bring summat to mend it with."

Zacky ran off agog, and Nell, who had been through a first-aid course in the early days of her rivalry with Marian Lamb, forced herself to swallow her repulsion of the drunken, stricken figure on the passage floor, and come forward with advice.

"He ought to be put to bed at once . . . he might collapse."

"He's collapsed," said Mrs. Beatup in the indifferent voice of shock.

"But he must be kept warm—I'll heat a brick in the oven. Harry, you and Mr.——"

"—Kadwell," put in the soldier, with a bold look into Nell's eyes.

"Mr. Kadwell—please carry him up to bed. Can you manage him up the stairs?"

"Reckon we'll have to," said Harry. "Stand clear, mother. . . . Got his shoulders, Mus' Kadwell?—I'll taake his legs."

They had a dead weight to carry to the upper floor, but Harry, though short, was a strong, stuggy little chap, and Steve Kadwell was enormous. He stood four inches over six foot and was proportionately hullish of girth. He was a handsome man, too—as he passed Nell, she noticed his brawny neck and great rolling quiff of fair, curly hair; she also noticed that he looked at her in a way no other man had done. The lamplight fell becomingly on her pretty scared face, and suggested with soft orange lights and melting shadows the curves of her little breast. At first she was pleased by his frank admiration, then something in it made her feel ashamed, and she drew back angrily into the shadow.

5

Nell had to stop away from school till the end of the term, for Mrs. Beatup could not possibly nurse her husband without help ; indeed, Nell's help was often not enough. A broken leg in itself was serious damage for a man of Mus' Beatup's age and habits, and into the bargain his alcoholic deprivations brought on an attack of delirium tremens about the fifth day of his illness. For this both Nell and her mother were inadequate—Nell was sickened and terrified by this horrible travesty of a human being that shook the springs in her father's bed, and Mrs. Beatup made him worse by trying to argue with him and taking as a personal affront his assertions as to the maggoty condition of the pillows. Harry had to spend two days away from the fields in the combined office of nurse and policeman, and on one occasion when even his strength was not enough to keep Mus' Beatup in bed, Kadwell of Stilliands Tower prolonged an evening's call of enquiry till the next morning.

Young Kadwell often called to enquire, and made himself useful in various ways. He was on a fortnight's sick-leave, after an outbreak of his old wound. He had been sniped during some patrol work at Loos in 1915, and though once more fit for service had been kept in England ever since. At present he was quartered at Eastbourne, but expected soon to be sent back to France.

At first Nell was too harassed and miserable to realise that his visits were largely on her account. Moreover, she was sexually very humble—she had loved so long without return that she had never learned to look for advances. But Kadwell had no reason to hide his feelings, nor any skill if he had had reason, so in time Nell was bound to become aware of them. The discovery did not give her any great pleasure—the faint

pride she occasionally felt at his notice was always dangerously on the edge of disgust. She was sensitive throughout her being to his coarseness—which at the same time had curious, intermittent powers of attraction—and there was something in his bold, appraising look which struck her with shame ; with his tastes, thoughts and appetites she had nothing in common. She avoided him as much as she could, feeling guilty because of the faint thrills which occasionally mixed with her dislike.

It was a sad year's ending. Her confinement in the house dragged down even further her health and spirits, her father's sick-bed filled her with wretchedness and shame. It seemed to preach to her the lesson of what she really was, in spite of all her dreams. How had she ever dared to plot for the greatness of the curate's love ? Who was she to mate with a priest, a scholar, a gentleman ? The sordid grind of her day, shut up in the muddle of Worge, her hours in that sag-roofed, stuffy bedroom, nursing her father through the trivialities and degradations of an illness brought on and intensified by drink—and then the crowning irony of an occasional " parish visit " from her loved one, his polite enquiries, his parsonic sympathy—all seemed to shout at her that she was nothing but a common girl, not only of humble but of shameful heritage, an obscure, half-educated nobody, who was now bearing the punishment of her presumptuous hopes.

She gave up her Sunday-school class, making her father's illness an excuse ; she also gave up going to church. This was partly due to lack of time, partly to a dread of the empty shell. She told herself bitterly that her religion had never been real—it had only been part of the mirage—she might as well give up the pretence of it. Besides, she could not bear to look any more on the background of her vanished dreams, the soft colours and lights against which they had glowed,

to hear the sighing tones which had set them to music in her heart.

One Sunday evening, when she had gone out to stretch her cramped legs, she heard the sound of singing come from the Bethel. She had never been inside except for Tom's marriage, but now in a sudden softening of her heart she thought she would go in. She opened the door, and slid into an empty pew—of which there was a big choice. Mr. Sumption stood swaying and beating time in the pulpit, while before him his mean congregation of Bourners and Hubbles sang—

“ Let Christian faith and hope dispel
The signs of guilt and woe” . . .

The air was heavy with the smell of lamp oil and Sunday clothes and the rot of the plaster walls. Nell sat, a little timid, in the corner of her pew. The scene was strange and grotesque to her, yet rather kindly. She thought Mr. Sumption looked ill and worn. She was shocked at his haggard smile, at the unhealthy smouldering of his eyes. . . . All Sunday Street knew that he was in trouble again about Jerry, who had not written for two months ; but the village had come to look upon it as Mr. Sumption's natural state to be in trouble about his son, and Nell felt there must be something worse than usual to account for his altered looks. Her own sadness made her soft and gentle towards him, and she watched him with pitying eyes.

The service ended, and Mr. Sumption came down to the chapel door, where he waited to shake hands with his departing congregation. Nell, with her ignorance of chapel ritual, had not expected this, and was a little flustered by it. Now he must inevitably know of her presence, which she had not meant. But there was no help for it, so she held out her hand in her gentle, well-bred manner as she passed him in the doorway. He gave a start of surprise.

“ I never expected to see you here,” he said.

"I was passing . . . and I thought the music sounded pretty . . . so I came in," faltered Nell.

"Yes—the music's pretty," he said absently, and she thought his voice sounded hoarse as if from a recent cold. Then her eyes met his, and each seemed to read the other's pain. Drawn together by a mystic community of suffering, they stood for a moment in silence, still holding hands. She felt his grip tighten on hers, and her throat suddenly swelled with tears. They blinded her as she went out into the dusk.

6

Shortly before Christmas Mrs. Beatup decided that Steve Kadwell had "intentions." He was now back at Eastbourne, but came over to Worge every Sunday, and after little more than half an hour beside a crushed and plaintive Mus' Beatup would sit in the kitchen till it was time to go home.

"Never shows the end of his nose to 'em at Stilliands Tower," said Mrs. Beatup. "Reckon thur's someone here he liks better."

"Do you mean me?" asked Nell wearily.

"Well, I doan't mean *me*—and I doan't mean that trug-faaced lump of an Ellen, so I reckon it's you. You needn't look so black at me, Nell—thur's no harm in a maid getting wed. I'd bin wed a year at your age, surelye, and three month gone wud my fust child—the one that never opened his eyes on day."

"Did father always drink?"

"Always a bit more or less—naun very lamentable—just here a little and there a little, as the Bible says. He's got wuss this last few year. It's that hemmed war."

"You and father aren't a very good advertisement for marriage."

Mrs. Beatup was huffed.

"I dunno wot you want—here we are three years

past our silver wedding, and five strong children still alive. It aun't the fault of his marriage he's bruk his leg—he might have done it single, and you cud say the saum of his drinking too."

Further argument was prevented by the arrival of Steve Kadwell on his Sunday visit. Nell, who had been a little excited by her mother's remarks, received him with more friendliness than usual. Certainly he was a very personable man—better-looking even than Ivy's Corporal Seagrim, and younger. The grip of his huge hand gave her an extraordinary sense of well-being and self-confidence, and the flush which always came while his eyes appraised her was this time half pleasurable. She fidgeted a good deal while he was upstairs.

His conversational powers were not great, and she suffered a reaction of boredom during tea, which she and her mother had ready for him when he came down. He ate enormously and not very elegantly, though he was not entirely a bumpkin—for he had spent an occasional leave in London, "having a good time," he told her with a wink. He talked a good deal about himself and various men in his platoon, whose dull doings and sayings he related in detail. Nell lost her new friendliness, and as soon as tea was over went out to feed the chickens and shut them up for the night.

She went into the barn to mix the feed. The sun had just set and there was a reddish dusk, through which she groped for the binns. She was kneading a paste with middlings, bran and barley-meal, when she heard a footstep on the frosty stones of the yard, and the next minute the barn grew quite dark as a man blocked the doorway.

"Your mother said I cud come and help you."

Nell felt somehow a little frightened.

"I'm all right."

"Reckon you are"—he came into the barn. "You're fine," and as he stooped down to her, she felt his breath

fanning her neck. Her hands ceased to move in the paste, and suddenly she began to tremble.

She tried to save herself with a small, faltering remark about the chicken-food—"Reckon soon we'll have to do without the meal."

He did not answer, but stooped closer still, so that she could smell him, his virile smell of hair and leather and tobacco. Then she suddenly snatched her hands out of the trug, all clogged and sticky with paste and meal, and tried to push him away.

"Don't . . . don't. . . ."

"Nellie—you're not afraid of me?"

"Please let me go"—for his arms were round her now.

"Not now I've got you, little kid. . . . I'm just-about going to keep you till I know what you're made of."

He laughed, and her struggling passed suddenly into weakness.

Then his mouth pressed down on hers, and Nell, who had till that moment known nothing but the bodiless spirit of love, suddenly met him in the power of his fierce body. The contact seemed to break her. She lay back helpless in Kadwell's arms, unable to stir or resist till he let her go, and he did not let her go till he seemed to have drawn all the life out of her in a long kiss—all the hoard of fire and sweetness which she had kept long years for another man he drew out of her with his lips and took for his own.

Then he released her, and she fell back against the binns, gasping a little, and crying, while her eyes strained to him through the dusk. She seemed unable to move, and he pointed to the bowl of chicken-food on the floor, saying, "Pick up that trug and come out."

She did, as he told her, and went out meekly at his heels.

7

Kadwell looked on Nell as a conquered kingdom. She herself was not so sure, for after he had gone home that night, her flagging powers revived, and she had a week in which to recruit her forces. During that week she passed through moments of sick revulsion from him, in which his strength and roughness disgusted her. But when he came again, she found herself powerless as she had been before.

He had strong allies. Nell was lonely, friendless, humbled to the dust; she was at the same time reacting from her former intellectual and ecclesiastical influences. His love helped restore her self-respect and his outstretched arms were rightly placed to catch her as the pendulum swung her away from her old tastes and glories. Nell found herself for the first time the interesting member of the family—at least in her mother's eyes. She was the courted, the beloved—even if hand in hand with love came strange tyrannies—and her sudden change to exaltation from degradation turned her head a little.

Sometimes there were hours when she saw clearly, saw that Kadwell was impossible as her mate, that they had nothing in common, that not even his passion was really acceptable to her. . . . He was a coarse brute, who would always trample on her tastes and wishes and ignore her mind and soul—and in these hours she knew that it was her mind and soul which counted most, in spite of the newly-awakened body. She was not really of a passionate nature, only a little drugged. She was doping herself with Steve so that she might forget the anguish and humiliation of the past autumn.

But this clearness did not last long, and it was always fogged in the same way—by a sense of her own unworthiness. She told herself that she was wicked to despise Steve, who was much better than she in his

different way. He might be uneducated, coarse, and self-willed, but he was strong and brave and resolute, all the things that she was not—"And I say unto you, despise not one of these little ones, for their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven." . . .

Then she would remember his wound, which he had got fighting for her and England over at Loos, and in the depths of that self-contempt which was so often with her now, alternating with her moods of self-confidence, she acknowledged that she had done nothing for the War. Though she had always prided herself on being more patriotic than the rest of her family, she had done far less than they—less than Tom, who had gone to fight, even if ignorant and unwilling ; less than Harry, who had boldly flung down his challenge to the earth and taken up arms against her for his country's sake ; less than Ivy, who was cheerfully and competently filling a man's place and doing a man's work ; less than her mother, who had borne these children for her country's need ; less even than her father, who paid rates and taxes and cultivated the ground. The fact that they were all, except perhaps Harry, more or less unconscious of their service, only made her reproach greater. She of her knowledge had done nothing, and they of their ignorance had done much. Who was she to despise them or Kadwell ? Should she not take this chance to do the little she could by bringing comfort and happiness into a soldier's life ? She knew all the difference that Thyrza had made to Tom—let her do the same for Steve, humbly, simply, conscious of her failure up till now.

Early in the New Year Bill Putland suddenly came home on leave, and still more suddenly married a bewildered and delighted Polly Sinden. They had not even been definitely engaged ; she had not known he was coming home till she got his telegram, fixing not only

the date of his arrival but the date of the wedding. They were married at Brownbread Street, by an elderly clergyman who was taking the curate's place during his honeymoon—Mr. Poulett-Smith had been married up at Dallington, and the joyful clash of his wedding chimes came to Nell as she sat with Steve in the sun-slatted murk of the Dutch barn, and made her more than usually submissive to his caresses.

Ivy, delighted at her friend's good luck, forgave a long coldness, and came to Polly's marriage. She brought with her Sergeant Staples, and after the ceremony took him to Worge for tea.

Mrs. Beatup had not been to the wedding, for Thyrza's illness had begun, and her mother-in-law had spent most of the afternoon down at the Shop.

"Oh, she's doing valiant," she said in answer to their enquiries, "but 'tis unaccountable hard on a girl to be wudout her husband at such a time. . . ."

"Where's Nell?" asked Ivy.

"Up wud her father, surelye. He's bin easier to-day, but he's a tedious cross oald man these times. You'd never think the pacerfist and objectionous conscience he's got lying in bed and reading the paapers and wanting things to eat and drink as he can't git—reckon he'd stop the War to-morrow for a bit of cheese."

"Kadwell bin here any more?"

"Reckon he never misses—it'll be Nell's turn next after Polly. You'd best maake haste, Ivy Beatup, or at the raate we're going, you'll be the only oald maid left in the parish."

"Ha! ha!" laughed Ivy, with her mouth full of bread.

"But Nell ull be a fool if she marries him," she added seriously. "He aun't her kind. I know him, and he's a bit of a swine, I reckon."

"Reckon he's a valiant, stout chap, and Nell ull be a fool if she says no."

Ivy did not argue the matter, but before she went away she made an opportunity to speak to her sister alone.

"Nell, you haven't promised Steve Kadwell?"

Nell did not answer for a moment—she looked dazed. Then she said slowly:

"Yes—I promised him on Sunday."

"Then write and tell him you've changed your mind."

"Why?"

"Because you're a fool. You know quite well he ain't the chap for you—you, wud all your liddle dential ways!"

The tears came into Nell's eyes.

"I love him."

Ivy stared critically at her. She seemed to have altered.

"Have you told mother?"

"No."

"When are you going to be married?"

"I dunno—we haven't talked about it yet."

"Well, doan't be in a hurry—give him a good think over."

She had no time to say more, and realised that there was not much more to be said. Nell seemed dazed and foolish, like a pilgrim lost in a strange land.

8

Sunday Street was dazzled by its multitude of marriages. There had been Tom Beatup's, not a year ago, then the curate's, and Polly Sinden's, on the top of each other in January, and now, in February, Nell Beatup's. The last was a surprise; who would have thought, asked the village, that Nell would be married before Ivy? One or two mothers improved their daughters' minds with the moral of demure, gentle Nell's marrying before her sister with her loud, friendly

ways. There was some jealousy, too, for Kadwell, heir of Stilliands Tower, was considered a good match, though a certain amount of suspicion attached locally to his morals, due to his having once spent a leave in Paris.

Nell's wedding was a shorn affair. Her father was, of course, unable to come and give her away, and she had to go up the aisle on the arm of a shuffling and miserable Harry, to be finally disposed of by Mrs. Beatup, who was full of doubts as to the legality of a marriage thus officiated. Ivy could not get another day off, so had been obliged to content herself with sending Nell a silver-plated cruet and a rather tactless message to "come to her if ever she felt things going a bit wrong." Thyrsa was not present, either. She had mended slowly, in spite of the joy of her little son, and felt unequal to the fag and excitement of a wedding, either socially or ecclesiastically. The gaps were completed by the absence of Mr. Poulett-Smith, who was still away on his honeymoon. He was expected back next week, and it was considered locally that Nell and Kadwell would have shown a more becoming spirit if they had waited for his ministrations. No one guessed that it was just this chance of being married in the curate's absence which had finally dropped the balance, and made Nell give way to her lover's entreaties and make him happy at once.

After the ceremony there was a breakfast at Worge, and that too was shorn. There had been no Ivy to help Mrs. Beatup with the cooking, and trug-faced Ellen had burnt the cake, which was not only sugarless, as Tom's had been, but without peel or plums. "Might as well eat bread and call it caake," said Mrs. Beatup drearily. "They both taaste lik calf-meal."

There was no butter, as butter did not pay at its present price, and was no longer made at Worge. Some greenish margarine had been Ellen's reward for

standing two hours outside the grocer's in Senlac, but the cake had swallowed it all up, and wanted more, judging by its splintering behaviour under the teeth. To balance these scarcities there was tinned salmon and tinned crab and tinned lobster—also two bottles of wine, left over from Tom's wedding, and watered to make them go further.

"This is wot you might call a War wedding," said Mrs. Beatup. "Nell, I'm unaccountable glad you got married in church—if it had bin a chapel marriage on the top of this"—and she waved her hand over the table—"I'd never quite feel as you wur praaperly wed."

As a further counterblast to irregularity she had insisted on Nell's being married in white satin, with a stiff white veil like a meat-safe bound over her hair with a wreath of artificial orange-blossom. She looked very pretty, with a becoming flush in the thick pallor of her skin. Her eyes were bright and restless, and she breathed quickly, so that her little pearl-and-turquoise locket, "the gift of the bridegroom," heaved under her transparencies—she was too shrinking and modest to have her gown cut low—like a shallop on a wave. She scarcely spoke during the meal, but sat twisting her wedding-ring and staring at her husband—following each movement with her eyes, apparently unable to look away from him.

The meal was not lively; it lacked Ivy's good-humour, Mus' Beatup's talkativeness, Bill Putland's wit, Mr. Sumption's big laugh and childish enjoyment of his food. The party consisted only of the two families—Beatups and Kadwells. Old Mus' Kadwell droned about the War, and the "droke" in which he prophesied it would end, Mrs. Kadwell compared with Mrs. Beatup a day's adventures in search of meat, Lizzie Kadwell tried to flirt with Harry, who was overwhelmed with shame and annoyance at her efforts, and Sim

Kadwell, who had been best man, gave wearying details of the Indispensable's Progress from tribunal to tribunal.

Steve Kadwell could get only a week-end's leave, so the honeymoon would be short, and afterwards Nell would come back to Worge and live there as before, except for her "teachering," which her husband had made her give up, so that she might be at hand when he wanted her, free to go with him on any unexpected leave. He would have longer leave given him soon, he promised her, and they would go to London and have a valiant time. On this occasion they were going no further than Brighton, but they would stay at a fine hotel and have late dinner and a fire in their bedroom.

Nell drove away with her hand limp and rather cold in Kadwell's big fondling clasp. The pale February sun slanted to Worge's roof from the west, and a clammy, mould-flavoured mist hung over the hedges, like the winter ghost of those fogs which had webbed the farm with dusty gold in harvest-time. Nell looked back at the old house and the fields behind it—since she was leaving home only for two days, it was queer to feel that she was leaving it for ever.

9

It was raining and foggy when she came back. Thick white muffles of cloud drifted up the fields, and hung between the hedges, catching and choking all sound. Rain fell noiselessly, almost invisibly, apparent only in an occasional whorl, in the dripping eaves of the stacks, the shining roofs of the barns, and the whiteness of the beaded grass. Nell came from Hailsham station in a cab—her husband had told her to do so, giving her paper money for the fare. He certainly was princely in his ideas of spending, and there were loud and envious exclamations at Worge when, instead of the soaked and

huddled figure expected, Nell appeared bone-dry, without even her umbrella unfurled.

"A cab from Hailsham!" cried Mrs. Beatup. "Reckon you've got a good husband."

"And did you have the fire in your bedroom?" asked Zacky.

"Yes," said Nell. "A shilling every night."

She kissed her mother and brothers, and Ivy, who was over for the day and now came out of the kitchen, with a bear's hug for her sister.

"You've got a new hat!" she exclaimed.

"Yes; Steve saw it in a shop in Brighton and bought it for me."

"Lork!" cried Mrs. Beatup.

"But it aun't your usual style," said Ivy; "you mostways wear 'em more quiet-like. I've seen many of that sort of hat come on the tram, and it's generally what the boys call a tart."

Nell flushed and looked away.

"We've got Thyrza here," said Mrs. Beatup. "She came up this morning afore the rain started, and we're kipping her till it's a done—fust time she's bin out, and I'm justabout fritted lest she taakes cold."

"Has she got the baby with her?"

"Surely. . . . Here's Nell, Thyrza, come up in a cab from the station, and her husband's guv her a new hat."

Thyrza's eyes opened big in wonder. She sat by the fire, with her child in her arms; she was pale, but seemed plump and healthy, and her eyes had an eager, yearning look which was new to them. Nell kissed her and the baby, and sat down by the hearth with a little shiver.

"I'll git you some hot tea in a minnut," said her mother, "and then I'll tell you a surprise about Ivy."

"Adone do, mother—you've half toald her now."

"I haven't—I only said it wur a surprise, which I reckon it aun't much of, since you've near married three men in the last twelvemonth."

Ivy groaned—"Reckon your tongue's lik a bruk wurzel-cutter—slipping all over the plaace. Well, Nell, you know it now—but guess who he is."

This was more difficult, as there were at least half a dozen possible claimants, and Nell restored the secret to a little of its lost glory by guessing wrong several times.

"It's Eric Staples," said Ivy at last, "and we're going out to Canada soon as ever he gits his discharge, which woan't be long now. He wur wounded and gassed at Vimy, but he's a stout feller still, and has got a liddle farm in Saskatchewan wot me and him ull kip the two of us. He says I'm the woman born for a colonial's wife."

"Reckon you are," said her mother fondly, "but I wish you cud have got a husband wot took you to hotels and guv you cab-rides and fine hats like Nell."

"I aun't the girl fur hotels and cabs—reckon I'm only the girl for washing the pots and scrubbing the floor, and lucky that's the girl Eric wants. I'd never do wud Nell's life—she's a lady . . ." and she squeezed her sister's hand.

Nell gave a faint squeeze in response. She was touched by Ivy's affection, at the same time it made her feel a little cold, for she guessed the reason; Ivy was only saying without words, "I'm standing by you, Nell—you've done a stupid thing, and nobody knows it but you and I. Howsumdever you can always come wud any trouble to old Ivy."

Tea was now on the table, with the remains of the wedding-cake. Mus' Beatup was asleep upstairs, so it was arranged that later on Nell should take him up his tea and pay him her dutiful greetings. Harry and Zacky came in very grubby after handling roots. Harry was now a pitiless tyrant who drove and slaved his brother out of school hours, making him dig and rake and cart and dung; for the unthinkable thing of a year

ago had happened, and the War was dragging on towards Harry's eighteenth birthday, threatening to move his battle front from the furrows and ditches of Sussex to the blasted fields of France.

Thyrza had a letter from Tom, which she read to the company, every now and then stopping to hum over some passage which for obviously pleasant reasons could not be read out loud.

"To think he's never seen his baby," she murmured, bending towards her crooked arm.

"To think of Tom ever having a baby to see," said Mrs. Beatup—"and you'd know he wur Tom's by his flat nose."

"Wot have you settled to call him?" asked Ivy. "Is it still Thomas Edward?"

"No, it's to be Thomas William, fur Bill Putland has promised to stand godfather."

"I doan't lik William as much as Edward. Wot maade you change, Thyrza?"

"Tom wants him called after his best pal, surelye."

"And after the Kayser, too—William's the Kayser's naum."

Thyrza looked shocked.

"You'll have to call him Bill fur short."

"That ud sound more like the Kayser than ever—I always call the Kayser Bill."

"Then call him Willie."

"That's the young Kayser, and Tom when he fixed William said as he must never shorten it to Willie, 'cos there's a kind of shell called Little Willie, and he says as if, when peace comes and he gits hoame, fulks wur to say, 'Here comes Little Willie,' he'd chuck himself down in the lane and start digging himself in—Ha! ha!" and Thyrza laughed at the joke, and tickled the baby to make it laugh too, which it didn't.

"Reckon he's too young to laugh," said Mrs. Beatup.

"He aun't too young to cry."

"We're none of us too young fur that, nor too oald, nuther."

Thyrza sighed gently—

"I'm unaccountable set on Tom's coming fur the christening—and Passon's been wanting to christen him; he asked me at the churching. I thought maybe Tom cud git leave to see his baby christened, but seemingly he can't."

"They're unaccountable short wud leave," said Mrs. Beatup. "Steve couldn't git more'n three days to git married in."

"But reckon he'll git some more later, woan't he, Nell?"

Nell started—during the little womanly talk her mind had gone off on questionings of its own."

"Leave? Yes. He's sure to get a week before he goes out to France."

"You're unaccountable lucky. Reckon he'll taake you to another hotel and buy you another hat."

"And send you home in another cab."

"I'll go up and have a look at father," said Nell.

There was silence in the kitchen for a little while after she went. Harry and Zacky had gone back to their digging, and Ivy and Mrs. Beatup sat squatting against Thyrza's lap, where the baby lay more helpless than a day-old kitten.

"Nell's middling quiet," said her mother at last.

"She's sad at having said good-bye to Steve," sighed Thyrza.

"I daon't waonder as she's vrothered," said Mrs. Beatup. "Courtied, cried, and married, all in a huddle lik that. Ivy, I hope as this ull be a lesson to you, and you'll bide your banns praaperly and buy your bits of things in more'n one day's shopping. Pore Nell, she sims all swummy and of a daze, and I doan't woander, nuther, wud all the hurriment thur's bin. Reckon she scarce knows yit if she's maid or wife."

"Reckon she does," said Ivy.

PART VI

BABY

I

TOM did not come home till March, and the baby had been christened before he arrived, Thyrza having proved too soft to resist ecclesiastical pressure. But her husband was not so disappointed as she had feared. Indeed, Tom's whole attitude towards the miracle she had wrought in his absence puzzled her a little.

She had met him at the cottage door with the baby in her arms, and after their first greeting he had said :

"Put the baby down, Thyrza. I can't kiss you praaperly." Then, with his face hidden in her neck, had murmured : "It's my wife I want."

"But aun't you justabout pleased wud your boy, dear?" she asked him later, when they were having tea and eggs in a cosy blur of firelight and sunshine.

"Reckon I am. But babies are unaccountable ugly ; and as fur hoalding him, I'd sooner nuss a dud shell."

"He aun't ugly, Tom ; everyone says he's a justabout lovely child—and weighs near fourteen pounds, which is valiant fur a boy of his months."

"Maybe—I know naun of babies. But you, Thyrza . . . reckon you're justabout the waonder of the world to me."

Her eyes filled with tears as she felt his hand groping for hers on her knees under the table.

"Reckon you're just another baby," she said tenderly. "And I'm the mother of you both."

2

But Tom learned to be father as well as husband in the days that followed—perhaps it was the joys of his husbandhood which woke the fatherhood in him. It did not quicken in a blinding flash, as motherhood had come to Thyrza when her baby was first laid in her arms, but grew and throve in his daily contact with the little bit of helplessness and hope which he and Thyrza had made between them. It seemed to develop out of and be part of his love for her, and in time it seemed to have a tender, mellowing effect on that love, making it less anxious and passionate, more selfless, more sweet, more friendly. . . .

Those days were different from the days they had spent together after their marriage. They never went for long walks now, but stopped in their little garden at the back of the cottage, where crocuses splashed the grass with purple and egg-yellow, and celandines crept in under the hedge from the fields of Egypt Farm. Here in the warm spring sunshine Thyrza would sit, rocking the baby's cradle with her foot, while she talked to Tom in her sweet, drawly voice, of the little trades and doings of the past year. Every now and then the shop-bell would ring through the cottage, and she would go off to serve and gossip, leaving baby in his father's care . . . "And doan't you dance him, Tom, or he'll be sick." For Tom was bolder now, and took perilous liberties with young William, just as now, in his third year of soldiering, he had begun to take them with the dud to which he had compared him . . . "Reckon he'll start fizzing a bit before he goes off."

In the evenings, when the child was asleep in the cradle beside their bed, they would go across the road to the willow-pond, and sit or stroll there in the March dusk. Those were wonderful days of spring, a March which was almost May, with sweet slumberous winds,

so thick and hazy that the grumble of the unceasing guns was lost in them, and the War's heart-beat never broke the meadow's stillness. Soft primrose fogs trailed over Horse Eye Marshes under the rising stars, and away beyond them on the sea a siren crooned, like the voice of the twilight and the deep. . . . When the sky was dark round the big stars, and Orion's sword hung above Molash Woods, they would go in to their supper in the lamplight, to the tender, intimate talk of their evening hours, and then up, with big reeling shadows moving before them on beam and p'aster in the candle-light, to the dim spring-smelling room where their baby slept, and where Thyrsa would sleep with her hair spread on the pillow like a bed of celandines, and Tom with his brown, war-caloused hand in the soft clasp of hers, and his head in the hollow of her breast.

Tom, of course, paid many visits to his family at Worge. He found Mus' Beatup an invalid in the kitchen, his leg propped on a chair before him. Owing to his constitution it had mended slowly, but four months of forced soberness had worked a wonderful result in toning up his whole body, so that in spite of his illness his eye was brighter, his hand steadier and his voice clearer than at any time in Tom's memory. Unfortunately, the boredom and privations of his state had only increased that "objectiousness" of disposition which Mrs. Beatup had deplored, and Tom had to sit and listen to long harangues, in which the War, the Christian Religion, God, Govunmunt, Monogamy, and War Agricultural Committees were toppled together in a common ruin. Nell no longer argued with him, his flicks and cuts had no power to wound, and he soon gave up trying to stir her into the little furies which had led to so many rousing arguments. It was queer how she had changed. . . . Her chief arguments were with her mother, who seemed to think that the ceremony of marriage was bound automatically to create an abstract

love of housekeeping in the female breast. She was astonished to find that Nell had now no greater love for making beds and washing dishes than in the days of her spinsterhood.

"I never heard of a married woman as cudn't maake a sago pudden," she said to Tom.

"She'd maake it fur her husband quick enough," said Tom with a grin.

"Well, Steve's here most Sundays, and she's never maade him naun but a ginger-cake, and she used to make that before she wur wed."

"Wait till she's got a liddle home of her own . . . that'll be all the difference, woan't it, Nell?"

Nell smiled faintly.

"Would you believe it, Tom?" said Mrs. Beatup, "but when we want a suet pudden now we've got to git it off a meat-card."

"We've heard out there as all you civvies wur on rations—and Mus' Archie one day he got the platoon for a bit of *parlez-voo* and toald us as how you wurn't starved, as so many chaps had letters from their wives, saying as they cud git naun to eat."

"Not starved! That's valiant. And wot does Mus' Archie know about it? Seemingly you doan't know wot war is out there wud all your tea and your butter and your meat. Reckon there'll never be peace as long as soldiering's the only job you can git fed at."

"Well, you've guv me an unaccountable good tea fur a starving family. And now I'll be off and see Harry about the farm."

Worge was in the midst of its spring sowings, and Harry spent his long days in the fields whose harvest he would not see. The Volunteer field was in potash now, dug for potatoes, and there were six more acres of potatoes over by the Sunk.

"They say as how a hunderd acres of potatoes ull feed four hunderd people fur a year," he said to Tom—

"and yit thur's always summat unaccountable mean about a spud."

Tom laughed. "You've done valiant, Harry." Now that his brother's adventure had justified itself, he had abandoned a good deal of his croaking attitude. Besides, if things really were getting scarce at home . . . he wouldn't like to think of Thyrza and the baby . . .

"I've done my best," said Harry moodily, "but it's over now. Reckon I'll be called up in two months' time."

"Who'd have thought it!—you eighteen!—and the liddle skinny limb of wickedness you wur when I went away. I'd never have believed it, if you'd toald me that in two year you'd have maade more of Worge than I in five."

"Father wants me to appeal; but it ud never do, I reckon. You cudn't git off, so I'm not lik to."

"And it wouldn't be praaper, nuther," said Tom rather huffily. "You wud a brother in the Sussex! Farming's all very well, Harry, but soldiering's better. I didn't think it myself at one time, but now I know different. A farm's hemmed liddle use if Kayser Bill gits his perishing plaace in the sun. Besides, the praaper job fur a praaper Sussex chap is along of other Sussex chaps, fighting fur their farms. That's whur I'd lik my old brother to be, and whur he'd lik to be himself, I reckon,"

"I shudn't," said Harry, "any more than you did at fust."

"I aun't maaking out as I enjoy it—so you needn't jump at me lik that. The chap who tells you he enjoys it out thur, reckon he taakes you fur a middling thick 'un, or he's middling thick himself. But wot I say is, that it's the praaper plaace fur a Sussex chap to be. Ask me wot I enjoy, and I'll tell you"—and Tom jerked his pipe-stem over the ribbed hump of the field towards the cottages of Sunday Street, stewing like apples in the

sunshine. "My fancy's a liddle hoame of my own, and a wife and a child in it, and my own bit of ground outside the door; and when we've wound up the watch on the Rhine, reckon I'll be justabout glad to taake my coat off and sit in the sun and see my liddle 'un playing raound—and be shut of all that tedious hell wot's over thur, Harry, acrost Horse Eye and the Channel, if folks at home only knew it—which seemingly they doan't . . . and I'm middling glad they doan't, surelye."

Harry was impressed, and a little ashamed.

"Never think as I aun't willing, Tom. I'm willing enough, though I'd grown so unaccountable set on the new ploughs. Howsumdever, I've got things started like, and Zacky, maybe, when I'm gone, he'll pull to and carry on, saum as I did; and father, he's twice the head he had afore he bruk his leg and cudn't git his drink. Seemingly, they'll do valiant wudout me, and I . . . well, I've come to love these fields so middling dear that if one day I find I've got to die fur them, reckon I shudn't ought to mind much."

3

"I must go and see Mus' Sumption," said Tom to Thyrza. He said it several times before he went, for the days swam in a golden fog over his home, shutting him into enchanted ground. It was hard to break out of it even to go to Worge, and he found himself shelving the thought of leaving for two hours of worse company the little garden where the daffodils followed the crocuses, the shop all stuffy with the smell of tea and candles, the bluish-whiteness of the little sag-roofed rooms, and his wife and child, who were not so much figures in the frame of it all as an essence, a sunshine soaking through it. . . . However, Thyrza kept him to his word.

"I'm tedious sorry fur Mus' Sumption—he looks that worn and wild. Maybe you cud give him news of Jerry."

"No good news."

"Well, go up and have a chat wud the pore soul. Reckon he'll be mighty glad to see you, and you're sure to think of summat comforting to say."

So Tom went, one evening after tea. He found the minister in his faded threadbare room at the Horse-lunges, writing the letter which every week he dropped into the post-box at Brownbread Street, and generally heard no more of. The evening sun poured angrily on his stooped grey head, and made the room warm and stuffy without the expense of a fire. The old, old cat sat sulkily before the empty grate, and the white mice tapped with little pink hands on the glass front of their cage. The thrush had been dead some months.

"Hello, Tom. This is kind of you, lad," and Mr. Sumption sprang up in hearty welcome, shaking Tom by the hand, and actually tipping the cat out of the armchair so that his visitor might be comfortably seated.

Tom sat down and pulled out his pipe, and for some minutes they edged and skated about on general topics. Then the minister asked suddenly—

"And how did you leave Jerry?"

"Valiant"—certainly Jeremiah Meridian Sumption was a hardy, healthy little beggar.

But Mr. Sumption was not deceived.

"Valiant in body, maybe. But, Tom, I fear for his immortal soul."

Tom did not know what to say. He had never before seen the minister without his glorious pretence of faith in his son.

"It's strange," continued Mr. Sumption, "but from his birth that boy was seemingly marked out by Satan. Maybe it was the bad blood of the Rossarmescroes or Hearn's; his mother was the sweetest, loveliest soul that ever slept under a bush; but there's no denying that the Hearn's blood is bad blood—roving, thieving,

lusting, Satanic blood—and he's got it in him, has my boy, more than he's got the decent blood of my fathers."

"Has he written to you lately?"

"Oh, he writes now and again. He's fond of me. But he doesn't sound happy. Then Bill Putland, when he came home to get married, he told me——"

There was silence, and Tom fidgeted.

"He told me as Jerry had got hold of a French girl in one of the towns—a bad lot, seemingly."

"He'll get over it," said Tom. "Reckon he can't have much love fur such a critter."

"You knew of it too, then?"

"Oh, we've all heard. He got First Field Punishment on her account, fur——"

"Go on."

"Thur's naun to say. I guess she's bad all through. Some of these girls, they're bits of stuff as you might say, but they'd never kip a man off his duty or git him into trouble on their account. Howsümdever, the wuss she is the sooner he's lik to git shut of her."

Mr. Sumption groaned.

"If only he could have married your sister Ivy!"

"Ivy aun't to blame."

"No—she's not. I mustn't be unjust. She treated him fair and square all through; he says it himself. But, Tom, it's terrible to think that one human creature's got the power to give another to Satan, and no blame attached to either."

"Maybe Jerry wur Satan's before he wur Ivy's," said Tom sharply; then felt ashamed as he met the minister's eyes with their tortured glow.

"Maybe you're right. This is Satan's hour. He's got us all for a season, and this War is his last kick before the Angel of the Lord chains him down in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone. These are the days of which the Scripture saith, that unless the Lord should shorten them for the Elect's sake, no man could be saved."

"I guess we've nearly done the Lord's job. The perishers are even more fed up than us, which is putting it strong. Let 'em start this Big Push of theirs as thurs' bin such a talk about. Doan't you vrother about Jerry, Mus' Sumption—he'll be shut of this girl before long, and you'll git him back here and wed him to a good soul as ull do better fur him than Ivy."

Mr. Sumption shook his head.

"This is the war which shall end the world."

"Reckon I aun't going out there, away from my wife and child and home, all among the whizz-bangs and the coal-boxes, and git all over mud and lice, jest to help on the end of the world. This world's good enough fur me, and I hope it'll go on a bit longer after peace is signed, so as I'll git a chance of enjoying it."

"And they shall reign with Him a thousand years."

Tom was a little weary of Mr. Sumption in this mood ; however, he felt sorry for him, and let him run on.

"You must be blind indeed," continued the minister, "if you don't see how the Scriptures have been fulfilled—nation against nation and kingdom against kingdom, and the Holy City given back to the Jews, and the sun turned to darkness with the clouds of poisoned gas, and the moon to blood . . . the blood of the poor souls that are killed in moonlight air-raids. . . ."

Tom knocked out his pipe.

"Then at last"—and the minister's eye kindled and his whole sunburnt face glowed with the mixed fires of hope and fanaticism—"the sign of the Son of Man shall appear in the heavens, and He shall come again in power and great glory. Even so, come, Lord Jesus—but come before our hearts are all broken. What's the use of chaining up the Dragon in the Lake if he's already devoured the world? Shorten these days, for the Elect's sake—save us from the burning, fiery furnace which is making frizzle of our bones and cinders of our hearts."

He suddenly dropped his head between his hands. Tom felt a bit upset. He had again and again heard all this in chapel, but it was embarrassing and rather alarming to have it coming from the next chair.

"Reckon you mind this War more'n I do," he remarked lamely.

"Because to you it is just war—while to me it's Judgment. This is the day of which the Prophet spoke, the day that shall burn as an oven, and our sons and daughters shall burn as tow. . . . Bless you, young chap! there have been other wars—the country's full of their dead names . . . there were two lakes of blood up at Senlac. . . . But this war, it's the End, it's Doomsday. Now it shall be proved indeed that Christ died for the Elect, for all save the Elect shall perish. Tom, I have a terrible fear that I shall have to stand by and see my boy perish."

"Oh, he'll pull through right enough—give him his head and he'll come to his senses afore long."

"I'm afraid not." Mr. Sumption rose and began walking up and down the room, his hands clasped behind him. The dipping sun poured over his burly figure, showing up in its beautiful merciless beam the seediness of his coat and the worn hollows and graven lines of his face. "I'm afraid not, Tom Beatup. I'm afraid I'll have to stand by and see my boy damned. I'll stand among the sheep and see him among the goats. There's no good trying to job myself into thinking he's one of the Elect—he knows he isn't, and I know it. Whereas I have Assurance—I've had it a dunnamany years. Between us two there is a great gulf fixed. I'll have to dwell for ever in Mount Sion, in the general assembly and church of the firstborn, and see him for ever across the gulf, in hell."

"Then reckon you'll be in hell yourself."

"It seems like it. But the ways of the Lord are past finding out. . . . And I would willingly give my soul for

Jerry's—the soul the Lord has damned from the womb. . . .”

Tom stood up. He felt he could not stand any more of this.

“Seemingly your religion aun't much of a comfort to you. . . . Well, I must be going now.”

“You'll come again?”

“Reckon I will, if you're lonesome.”

“And look here, Tom; you won't say a word to other folk of what I've spoken—about Jerry, I mean. It ud never do if the parish came to think that he was getting into bad ways.”

“I'll say naun—trust me. Reckon Jerry's middling lucky to have you stick by him as you do.”

“Jerry once said he sometimes felt as if there was only me between him and hell. Seemingly I'm the only friend he's got.”

Tom felt very sorry for Mr. Sumption. He told Thyrsa that he thought he must be getting queer with his troubles, and Thyrsa immediately planned to take the baby to see him; and a day or two later they asked him down to the shop for the afternoon, and had the pleasure of seeing him momentarily forget his troubles in a good tea. “Reckon the poor soul thinks a lot of his inside,” said Thyrsa, “and doan't always git enough to fill it with.”

4

The last days of Tom's fortnight seemed to rush by in spate; they blew before the March wind like the dust. Thyrsa hurried on her little preparations for his departure—she was making him new shirts, and with loving hands repairing all of his that was frayed and worn, from his shirt to his soul. . . . For even Tom's simple soul had been touched by the blight of war, and there was a look at the back of his eyes which came from things he never spoke of . . . things he had seen

out there in the land of horrors, which the folk at home did not realise—and he was unaccountable glad they did not. Thyrsa's love had driven that look to the back of his eyes and those memories to the back of his heart, though probably she would never be able to drive either the look or the memories quite away. Such things were now the lot of boys. . . .

He still went occasionally to Worge, and sat with his father and mother in the kitchen, or gave Harry a hand on the farm. He persuaded Mus' Beatup to engage a lad for cow and stable work, so that his brother's burden was made lighter. One day Ivy came over with Sergeant Staples. The slow formalities of his discharge were crawling on, and she hoped to be married and to sail for Canada before the summer was out. It struck Tom that she had sweetened and sobered since he saw her last. Rumours of her affair with Seagrim had reached him, and he was glad to have her settled down. "Ricky's a valiant pal," she said once, and the words struck the difference between her love for him and the love she had had for Seagrim, and would have explained, if anyone had cared for an explanation, the comparative ease and quickness with which she had turned from one to the other. Seagrim had never been a pal—he had been a spell, a marvel, a magic that would never come back, a wonder which a woman's heart must know but can seldom keep. Ricky, with his red hair and grinning monkeyish face, would never throw over Ivy's world the glamour of those weeks with Seagrim, he would never transfigure the earth or turn pots to gold. . . . On the other hand, as Ivy said, he was better to jog along with, and she was certainly born for the arduous and endurances of a colonial's wife—"So that's settled and done with," she thought to herself with a contented sigh—"and I reckon I'm a middling lucky girl. It's queer how Nell and me have seemingly done just the saum—lost our hearts to one

man and then gone and married another. But I kept my head and did it sensible, while she, reckon she lost hers and did it unsensible. Poor Nell! . . . but I told her straight as Kadwell wur a swine."

Nell had left the farm about four days after Tom's return. Her husband had suddenly claimed her, and had fetched her away to spend his last leave with him in London. He expected to go to France in a week or two now. Tom did not dislike his new brother-in-law; he thought him a "good feller," and considered him wonderfully forbearing with Nell when she cried on saying good-bye to her mother, and went away with her pretty face all marbled and blotched with tears.

"I've got no patience wud girls wot taake on them silly maidenish airs," he said to Thyrza. "You never cried when you caum to me, surelye."

"I'd no mother to say good-bye to. Some girls always cry when they say good-bye to their mothers."

"Nell never used to be so set on mother in the oald times."

"But it's different now—it always is," said Thyrza wisely—"that's why some folks ud sooner have a darter than a son. When a son goes marrying he turns away from his parents, but a girl, the more she loves outside the more she loves at home."

Tom pondered her words, and found himself beginning to feel a little guilty.

"Maybe you're right. I hope Will woan't go and disremember us when he weds."

"Reckon he will," said Thyrza—"it's only nature."

Tom went up to Worge every evening till the end of his leave.

5

The last evening came, and Tom's good-byes.

"Reckon it's always 'good-bye' now," said Mrs. Beatup. "Good-bye to Ivy, good-bye to Nell, good-

bye to Tom—sims as if, as if that ward ud git lik my oald broom, wore out from overuse.”

“Thur’d be no good-byes if thur hadn’t bin howdy-dos fust. So cheer up, mother, and we’ll be saying howdy-do agaun before Michaelmas.”

“And then good-bye. Oh, Tom, when ull this tedious war have done?”

“When it’s finished. Doan’t you fret over that, mother—reckon that aun’t your job.”

“I wish it ud have done, though, before our hearts are broke.”

Nell was expected home that evening, and Mrs. Beatup persuaded Tom to wait for her. He spent the interval going over the farm with Harry, and giving last advice, though it was astonishing how firm on his legs his brother now stood. He also took his chance of a straight talk with Zacky.

“Reckon you’re growing up lik a young colt, and you’ll have to taake your turn now—step into Harry’s plaace saum as he stepped into mine.”

Zacky’s besetting sin was not a lust for adventure in woods and distant fields; he moved in a more humdrum circle of dereliction—marbles and conkers and worms and string. However, Tom discovered that he had a passion for “taking things to pieces” and hoped to inspire him to zeal over the new mechanical reaper which was that year to be the wonder of Worge’s harvest.

To everyone’s disappointment, Nell did not arrive in a cab. She came on foot from Senlac station, leaving her box to follow by the carrier. Mrs. Beatup felt that Tom had been cheated, on his last day at home, of a fine spectacular entertainment, and was inclined to be peevish with Nell on his account.

“Reckon it wurn’t your husband who told you to walk six mile in the dust.”

“No—but it’s such a beautiful evening, and I felt I wanted the fresh air after London.”

She looked worn and fagged, as she sat down by the fire, spreading out her pale hands to the flames to warm.

Mrs. Beatup sniffed.

"Reckon thur's more air-raids than air in London," said Tom—"Ha! ha!" and they all laughed at the joke.

"But they dudn't have naun while Nell was there," said Mrs. Beatup, continuing her grumble. "Nell, how dud you lik the Strand Paliss Hotel?"

"Oh, pretty fair—it was very grand, but a great big barrack like that makes my head turn round."

"How big was it?" asked Zacky. "As big as church?"

"Bigger a dunnamany times," said Mrs. Beatup. "I've seen the Hotel Metropoil in Brighton, and reckon you cud git the whole street into it."

"Did you have a fire in your bedroom?"

"No—there were hot pipes."

"Hot pipes! How queer!—I shud feel as if I wur in a boiler."

"And there was hot and cold water laid on."

"Reckon you washed."

"I had a bath."

"In your room?"

"No—in a bathroom."

"A real white bath in a bathroom! . . ." Mrs. Beatup was regaining confidence in her daughter. "You'll be gitting too grand fur us here. They say as once you start taaking baths it's like taaking drams, and you can't git shut of it. I'll have to see if I can't fix fur you to have the wash-tub now and agaun. . . . Oh, you'll find us plain folks here."

Nell did not speak; she was stooping over the fire and her spread hands shook a little.

"Reckon she's low," said Mrs. Beatup in a hoarse whisper to Tom; "she's said good-bye to her man,

and she's vrothering lest he never comes back. It's always 'good-bye' fur her lik fur the rest of us."

"It'll have to be 'good-bye' fur me now, mother. I must be gitting hoame."

Mrs. Beatup stood up sorrowfully—

"Oh, Tom, I've a feeling as you'll never come back."

"You've always had that feeling, mother—and I've always come back, surelye."

"But maybe I'm right this time. They say as the Germans ull maake a gurt push this Spring, and I reckon they're sure to kill you if they can."

"Reckon they'll have a try—and if my number's up I mun go, and if it aun't, I mun stay. So thur's no sense in vrothering."

"You spik very differunt, Tom, from when you wur a lad."

"I feel different, you can bet."

"And yit it's scarce two year ago since you wur naun but a boy, and now you're naun of a boy that I can see—you're a married man and the father of a child."

"And whur's the harm of it?—you needn't look so glum."

He took her in his arms and kissed her. Then he kissed his father—

"Good-bye, dad—you'll be climbing fences afore I'm back, and—" in a friendly whisper, "you kip away from that old Volunteer. See wot gitting shut of the drink has maade you—you're twice the man, fur all your leg. You kip on wud it, father. You've got a start like—it ought to be easy now."

"Kip on wud wot, my lad?—wud my leg, or the drink, or doing wudout the drink? You doan't spik clear and expressly—reckon you're gitting just a brutal soldier."

"Maybe I am, Faather."

"And you'll never come raound me to kip teetotal

when I think of them Russians—all got shut of drink the fust month of the war, and then went and bust up and ruined us. It's bin proved as the war ull go on a dunnamany years on account of them valiant teetotallers. If we British all turn teetotal too, reckon as the war ull last fur ever."

"Reckon you've got the brains!" said Tom, but not in quite the same tone as he used to say it.

He said good-bye to Harry and Zacky, and to Nell—with a pat on her shoulder and a "Doan't you fret, my dear—he'll come back."

Mrs. Beatup went down with him to the end of the drive. She looked on this as her privilege, and also had some hazy idea about giving him good advice. All she could think of on the present occasion was to "Kip sober and finish the war."

"Wish that being my faather's son maade it as easy to do one as it does to do t'other. Now doan't you start crying, fur I tell you I'll be back before you scarce know I'm a-gone."

"It's queer, Tom . . . now, thur's summat I want to know. Tell me—is a wife better than a mother?"

"Better—but differunt. Doan't you fear, mother. I'll always want you. Maybe I went and disremembered you and faather a bit after I wur married, but now I've a youngster of my own it just shows me a liddle bit of wot you feel . . . and I'm sorry."

He suddenly kissed her work-soiled, roughened hand, with its broken nails and thick dull wedding-ring sunk into the gnarled finger.

"That's wot they do to ladies in France."

She watched him walk off down the Street, stopping to light his pipe where the oast of Egypt Farm made a lee against the racing wind. Then she walked slowly

and heavily back to the house, planning a little consolation for herself in listening to Nell's tale of wonders.

But when she came into the kitchen she found that Nell had gone upstairs—to wash, Mus' Beatup told her. Moved by a spasm of tenderness, she took the kettle from the fire and creaked off with it to her daughter's room.

Knocking at bedroom doors was a refinement unknown at Worge. Mrs. Beatup accordingly burst in, to find Nell sitting on the bed, with her face hidden in her hands. She had taken off her gown, and sat arrayed in a short silk petticoat and an under-bodice of a transparency that made her mother gasp ; over her shoulders was nothing but two pale-blue ribbons, against which her arms showed yellowish-white and plumper than they used to be. So astonished was Mrs. Beatup at this display that she scarcely noticed the hidden face.

"Nell, how fine ! But you'll catch your death—I wonder your husband lets you . . ." Her voice trailed off, for Nell had dropped her hands, and her face was running with tears.

"My poor liddle girl !"—the mother's heart went out in pity. She put the kettle on the floor, and going over to the bed, sat down on it with a great creaking of springs, and put her arms round her daughter—at first rather gingerly, for fear of spoiling so much elegance, then straining them closer, as Nell, melted into an abandonment of weakness, began to sob against her breast.

"My poor liddle girl ! . . . It's unaccountable sad fur you. I know. . . . I know. . . . But doan't you vrother, chick—he'll come back. I've a feeling as he'll come back."

A long shudder passed through Nell. Then suddenly she raised herself, gripping her mother's arms, while her eyes blazed through her tears. "Oh, mother, mother . . . don't you see ? . . . it's not that I'm afraid he won't come back . . . it's that I'm afraid he will."

She threw herself down upon the pillow, sobbing with the accumulated misery, humiliation, rage and dread of weeks. Mrs. Beatup stared at her, dumbfounded.

"Nell—wot are you talking of? You doan't want Steve to come back?"

"No—I hate him. I—I . . . if he comes back . . . and takes me away to be my husband for good, I—I'll kill myself."

"Reckon you doan't know what you're saying. You loved him unaccountable when you wur wed."

"I didn't love him . . . not truly. And he's killed the little love I had."

"But all the fine things he's guv you. . . ."

"Doan't talk about them. They're just part of the horribleness."

"Then you're telling me as you maade a mistaake?"

"Reckon I did. Reckon my only chance now is that he won't come back."

She began to sob again, not tempestuously, but slowly and painfully, gradually jerking to silence. A soft green twilight deepened in the room, and the low gurgling calls of starlings trilled under the eaves. The mother still sat on the bed-foot, staring at her daughter, who now lay still, a pool of blue in the dusk with her silk petticoat, her shoulders showing nacreous against the dead-white of the pillow. Mrs. Beatup was stunned, her mind slowly adjusting itself to the revelation that there was in war another tragedy besides the tragedy of those who do not come back—and that is the tragedy of some who do.

7

The dipping sun slanted over the fields from Stilliands Tower, and made Tom Beatup's khaki like a knight's golden armour as he trudged home. The sky was a spread pool of blue, full of light like water, and moss-green in the east where it dipped towards the woods of

Senlac. Soft whorls of dust bowled down the lane before a fluttering, racing wind, that smelled of primroses and rainy grass.

Tom heaved a deep sigh of well-being as he stopped to light his pipe. To-morrow he would have left these sun-swamped sorrowless fields and be back in the country where the earth was torn and gutted as if by an earthquake, all scabbed and leprous as if diseased with the putrefaction of its million dead—where the air rocked with crashes, roars, rumbles, whizzes, caterwaulings, and reeked with flowing stenches of dead bodies, blood, and hideous chemicals—where any thornbush might conceal a sight of horror to freeze heart and eyeballs . . . and yet he could put the dread of it out of his mind, and smile contentedly, and blink his eyes in the sun.

A few yards down the street his cottage showed its little misted shape, while its windows shone like garnets in the western radiance, and a tall column of wood-smoke rose behind it, blowing and bowing in the adventurous wind, which brought him snatches of its perfume, with the sweetness of wet banks and primroses and budding apple-boughs. . . . He knew that in the shop door Thyrza stood with the baby in her arms ; she would be waiting for him there with the sunshine swimming over her white apron and purple gown, making the downy fluff on little Will's head to shine yellow as a duckling's feathers. The thought of wife and child was not cankered by the dread that he might never see them again. The parting when it came would be terrible—he might break down over it, as he had broken down before—but he had all a soldier's solid fatalism and scorn of the future, and was, perhaps, strengthened by the inarticulate knowledge that if he were to die to-morrow he died a man complete. From the lumbering, unawakened lad of two years ago he had come to a perfect manhood, to be husband and father, fulfilling

himself in a simple, natural way, with a quickness and richness which could never have been if the war had not seized him and forced him out of his old groove into its adventurous paths. If he died, the war would but have taken away what it had given—a man; for through it he had in a short time fulfilled a long time, and at twenty-two could die in the old age of a complete, unspotted life.

He passed under the sign of the Rifle Volunteer, straddling the road in his green uniform, with his rifle and pot of beer—"Queer old perisher," thought Tom, looking up at him—"I shudn't like to go over the top in that rig."

The Rifle Volunteer creaked noisily on his sign, as if the soldier of bygone years challenged the soldier of to-day.

"I am the man armed for the War That Never Was, who marched and drilled and camped to fight the French, who never came. And you are the man unarmed for the War That Had To Be, who never drilled or marched or camped to fight the Germans, who came and nearly drove you off the earth."

"Reckon he'd have bin most use a hunderd mile away," scoffed Tom.

"I went of my free-will and you because you were fetched," said the Rifle Volunteer. "Two years ago I saw you walking down this road under my patriotic legs, a wretched, drag-heel conscript."

"He never fought in any war that I know of," thought Tom, "and yit I reckon thur used to be wars in these parts in the oald days. Minister says the country's full of thur naums. I doan't know naun, surelye."

The east wind blew from Senlac, sweet with the scent of the ash-trees growing on the barrow where Saxon and Norman lay tumbled together in the brotherhood of sleep.

"Here—when a great whinny moor rolled down

from Anderida to the sea, and Pevens Isle and Horse Isle were green in the bight of the bay, and the family of the Heastings had finished building their ham by the coast—here used to be the Lake of Blood, where hearts were drowned. A red tun stands on it now, and good folk come to it on market-days. Thus shall it be with all wars—out of the red blood the red town, and under the green barrows friend and foe, tumbled together in the brotherhood of sleep.”

The east wind like a Saxon ghost whistled against Tom’s neck.

“We fought as you did once—we hated the Norman as you hate the German, yet look how peacefully we sleep together.”

“They must have been funny,” thought Tom, “those oald wars wud bows and arrows.”

“Harold! Harold! . . . Rollo! Rollo!” cried the ghosts on the east wind from Senlac.

“God save the Queen,” said the Rifle Volunteer.

PART VII

MR. SUMPTION

I

IT was early in April. A soft fleck of clouds lay over the sky, so thin, so rifted, that the sinking lights of afternoon bloomed their hollows with cowslip. A misty warmth hung over the fields, drawing up the perfume of violets and harrowed earth, of the soft clay-mud of the lanes, not yet dry after a shower and with puddles lying in the ruts like yellow milk.

Sunday Street was in stillness, like a village in a dream. Thin spines of wood-smoke rose from its chimneys, blue against the grey dapple of the clouds. The chink of a hammer came from the Forge, but so muffled, so rhythmic that it seemed part of the silence. The watery atmosphere intensified that effect of dream and illusion which the village had that evening. Through it the cottages and farms showed with a watery clearness and at the same time a strange air of distance and unreality. There was flooding light, yet no sunshine, distinctness of every line in eaves and tiling, of every daffodil and primrose in garden-borders, and yet that peculiar sense as of something far away, intangible, a mirage painted on a cloud. It was thus that the vision of his home might rise before the stretched, abnormal sight of a dying man, a simulacrum, a fetch. . . .

Thyrza Beatup sat beside the willow pond at the corner of the Street, on the trunk of a fallen tree. In her arms she held her baby, asleep in a shawl. She felt warm and content and rather sleepy. In her pocket

was Tom's last letter from France, but she did not read it, for she knew it by heart . . . " I think of you always, you dear little creature, you and baby—even when my mind is full of the things out here, and this great battle which is seemingly the biggest there's ever been." . . . " How I wonder when I'll get another leave. I reckon baby ull have grown a bit and you'll be just the same." . . . " I shut my eyes and I can see your face ; reckon I love you more every time I think of you, and I think of you day and night, so you can guess all the love that makes." . . . Tender phrases floated in and out of her mind, and then she smiled as she remembered a funny story Tom had told her about a chap in the A.S.C. . . .

She drew the baby closer into her arms, looking down at his little sleeping face, which she thought was growing more and more like Tom's. She drooped her eyelids and in the mist of her lashes half seemed to see Tom's face there in the crook of her elbow, where it had so often been, turning towards her breast. Poor Tom ! his head was not so softly pillowed these nights . . . and as suddenly she pictured him lying on the bare, foul ground, his head on his haversack, his cheeks unshaved, his body verminous, his limbs all aching with cold and stiffness—he, her man, her darling, whom she would have had rest so sweetly and so cleanly, with nothing but sweetness and comfort for the body that she loved—then a sudden flame of rebellion blazed up in her heart, and its simplicity was scarred with questions—Why was this terrible War allowed to be ? How was it that women could let their men go to endure its horrors ? Did anyone in England ever yet know what it was these boys had to suffer ? Oh, stop it, stop it ! for the sake of the boys out there, and for the boys who have still to go . . . save at least a few straight limbs, a few unbroken hearts.

She clenched her hands, and little Will moaned against her breast · and as she felt his little fists beating

against her, the hard mood softened, and she bent over him with soothing words and caresses—words of comfort for herself as well as for her child.

“Don’t cry, liddle Will—daddy ull come back—daddy’s thinking of us. He’s out there so that you ull never have to go; he bears all that so that you may never have to bear it.”

A thick grape red had trickled into the west like a spill of wine. The afternoon had suddenly crimsoned into the evening, and ruddy lights came slanting over the fields, deepening, reddening, so that the willows were like flames, and the willow pond was like a lake of blood. . . . The night wind rose, and Thyrza shivered.

“We mun be gitting hoame, surelye,” and she stood up, pulling the shawl over the baby’s face.

At the same time her heart was full of peace. The questioning mood had passed, and had given place to one single deep assurance of her husband’s love. Tom’s love seemed to go with her into the house, to be with her as she bathed Will and put him to bed, to drive away her brooding thoughts when, later on, she sat alone in the lamplight at her supper. She sang to herself as she put away the supper, a silly old song of Tom’s when he first joined up :

“The bells of hell go ring-aling-aling
For you, but not for me;
For me the angels sing-aling-aling,
They’ve got the goods for me.
O Death, where is thy sting-aling-aling?
Where, grave, thy victory?
The bells of hell go ring-aling-aling
For you, but not for me.”

Now that darkness had fallen, the clouds had rolled away from the big stars blinking in the far-off peace. A soft, sweet-smelling cold was in the house, the emanation of the damp mould of the garden, where hyacinths bathed their purples and yellows in the white flood of the moon—of the twinkling night air, cold and clear as

water—of the fields with their brown moist ribs and clumps of violets.

Thyrza's room was full of light, for the westering moon hung over Starnash like a sickle, and the fields showed grey against their hedges and the huddled woods. She undressed without a candle, so bright was the moon-dazzle on her window, and after saying her prayers climbed into bed, where little Will now lay in his father's place. Once more she tried to picture that his head was Tom's, and that her husband lay beside her, while Will slept in his cradle, as he had slept when Tom was at home. But the illusion faltered—Will was so small, and Tom was so big in spite of his stockiness, and took up so much more room, making the mattress cant under him, whereas Will lay on it as lightly as a kitten. However, she did not badly need the comfort of make-believe, for her sense of Tom's love was so real, so intense, and so sweet, that it filled all the empty corners of her heart, making her forget the empty corners of her bed. She lay with one arm flung out towards the baby, the other curved against her side, while her hair spread over the pillow like a bed of celandines, and the moonlight drew in soft gleams and shadows the outlines of her breast.

She lay very still—nearly as still as Tom was lying in the light of the same moon. . . . But not quite so still, for the stillness of the living is never so perfect, so untroubled as the stillness of the dead.

2

Worge knew nearly as soon as the Shop, for Nell, running down after breakfast to buy tobacco for her father, found the blinds still drawn. The door was unlocked, however, so she went in and called her sister-in-law. There was no answer, and, vaguely alarmed, she went upstairs, to find Thyrza sitting on the unmade

bed, still wearing the print wrapper she had slipped on when the shop-bell rang during her dressing.

"I must go and tell his mother," she kept repeating, when Nell had read the telegram, and had set about, with true female instinct, to make her a cup of tea.

"Don't you worry over that, dear—I'll tell her."

"Reckon he'd sooner I did."

"No—no ; it would be such a strain for you. I'll go when I've made your tea."

At that moment little Will woke up, and cried for his breakfast—his mother had forgotten him for the first time since he was born. Nell welcomed the distraction, though her heart tightened as she saw Thyrza's arms swoop to the child, and quiver while she held him with his little cool tear-dabbled cheek against her own so tearless and so dry. Nell left her with the boy at her breast, a big yellow hank of hair adrift upon her shoulder, and her eyes staring from under the tangle, fixed, strangely dark, strangely bright, as if their grief were both a shadow and an illumination.

She herself ran back on her self-inflicted errand, all her being merged into the one pain of knowing that in ten minutes she would have turned a jogging peace to bitterness, and bankrupted her mother's life of its chief treasure. She saw herself as a flame leaping from one burning house to set another light.

Mrs. Beatup's reception of the news held both the expected and the unexpected.

"I knew it," she said stonily—"I felt it—I felt it in my boans. And I toald him, too—I told him, poor soul, as he'd never come back, and now he'll never come, surelye." Then she said suddenly—"I mun go to her."

"Go to whom, mother dear ?"

"Thyrza. He'd want it . . . and reckon she feels it even wuss than me."

Nothing could dissuade her, and off she went, to

comfort the woman with whom she had so long played tug-of-war for her son.

Nell stayed behind in the dreary house, where it seemed as if things slunk and crept. It was holiday-time, so Zacky was at home, sobbing in a corner of the haystack, crying on and on monotonously till he scarcely knew what he cried for, then suddenly charmed out of his grief by a big rat that popped out of the straw and ran across his legs. Elphick and Juglery mumbled and grumbled together in the barn, and talked of the shame of a yeoman dying out of his bed, and cast deprecating eyes on the indecency of Harry, dark against the sky on the ribbed swell of the Street field, making his late sowings with the new boy at his heels. Up and down the furrows went Harry, with his head hung low, in his ears the mutter of the guns, so faint on the windless April noon that he sometimes thought they were just the sorrowful beating of his own heart—up and down, scattering seed into the earth, leaving his token of life in the fields he loved before he was himself taken up and cast, vital and insignificant as a seed, into the furrows of Aeldama or the Field of Blood. . . .

Mus' Beatup sat crouched over the fire, the tears every now and then welling up in his eyes, and sometimes overflowing on his cheeks, whence he wiped them away with the back of his hand. "'Tis enough to maake a man taake to drink," he muttered to himself—"this is wot drives men to drink, surelye." Every now and then he looked up at the clock.

The clock struck twelve, and the Rifle Volunteer called over the fields :

"Come, farmer, and have a pot with me. You've lost a son in your War—there were no sons lost in mine, but pots of beer are good for joy or sorrow. Come and forget that boy for five minutes, how he looked and what he said to you, forget this War through which good yeomen die out of their beds, and drink with the

Volunteer, who drilled and marched and camped and did every other warlike thing save fighting, and died between his sheets."

Mus' Beatup groped for his stick. Then he shook his head rather sadly. "The boy's scarce cold in his grave. Reckon I mun wait a day or two before I disremember his last words to me."

Mrs. Beatup did not come home till after supper, and went to bed almost at once. She felt fagged and tottery, and there was a shrivelled, fallen look about her face. When she was in bed, she could not sleep, but lay watching the moon travel across the room, lighting first the mirror, then the wall, then her own head, then maaster's, then climbing away up the chimney like a ghost. Every now and then she fell into a little, light dose, so thridden with dreams that it was scarcely sleeping.

In these dreams Tom was always a child, in her arms, or at her feet, or spannelling about after the manner of small boys with tops and string. She did not dream of him as grown, and this was the basis of her new agreement with Thyrsa. Thyrsa could never think of him as a child, for she had never seen him younger than eighteen; all her memories were concentrated in his few short years of manhood, and his childhood belonged to his mother. So his mother and his wife divided his memory up between them, and each thought she had the better part.

Mrs. Beatup wondered if anyone—Bill Putland or Mus' Archie—would write and tell her about Tom's end. So far she had no idea how he had died, and her imagination crept tearfully round him, asking little piteous questions of the darkness—Had he suffered much? Had he asked for her? Had he wanted her?—Oh, reckon he had wanted her, and she had not been there, she had not known that he was dying, she had been pottering round after her household, cooking and washing up and sweeping and dusting, and thinking of him

as alive and well, while all the time he was perhaps crying out for her in the mud of No Man's Land. . . .

The tears rolled down her cheeks in the darkness that followed the setting of the moon. Was it for this that she had borne him in hope and anguish?—that he should die alone, away from her, like a dog, in the mud? . . . She saw the mud, he had so often told her of it, she saw it sucking and oozing round him like the mud outside the cowhouse door; she saw the milky puddles . . . she saw them grow dark and streaked with blood. Then, just as her heart was breaking, she pictured him in the bare clean ward of a hospital, as she had seen him at Eastbourne, with a kind nurse to relieve his last pain and take down his last little messages. Oh, someone was sure to write to Tom's mother and tell her how he had died, and perhaps send her a message from him.

The daylight crept into the room, stabbing like a finger under the blind, and with it her restlessness increased. Then a pool of sunshine gleamed at the side of the bed. She felt that she could not lie any longer, so climbed out slowly from under the blankets. She tried not to disturb her husband, but she was too unwieldy for a noiseless rising, and she heard him turn over and mutter, asking her what she meant by "waaking a man to his trouble"—then falling asleep again.

She went down to the kitchen, to find Harry, his eyes big and blurred with sleep, just going to set about his business in the yard. Moved by a quake of tenderness for this surviving son, she made him a cup of cocoa, and insisted on his drinking it before he went out to work. Then she did her own scrubbing with more care than usual—"Reckon we must kip the farm up, now he's agone." Urged by the same thought she went out to the Dutch barn and mixed the chicken food, then opened the hen-houses, feeling in the warm nests for eggs.

By now the sun was high, a big blazing pan slop-

ping fire over the roofs and into the ponds. The air was full of sounds—crowings, cacklings, cluckings, the scurry of fowls, the stamping of horses, and then the whining hiss of milk into zinc pails. Hoofs thudded in the lane, the call of a girl came from a distant field, all the country of the Four Roads was waking to life and work, faltering no more than light and darkness because one of its sons had died for the fields he used to plough. Wheels crunched in the drive, and then came the postman's knock. Mrs. Beatup put down her trug of meal, and waddled off towards the house . . . perhaps a letter had come about Tom ; it was rather early yet, still, perhaps it had come.

But Harry had already been to the door, and shook his head when she asked if there was anything for her.

“Thur's naun.”

“Naun fur none of us ? ”

“Only fur me.”

She saw that he was carrying a long, official-looking envelope, and that his hand was clenched round it, as if he held a knife.

“Wot's that ? ”

“My calling-up paapers.”

3

Tom was not the only local casualty that week. Bourner heard of the death of his eldest son, a youth who had somehow squeezed himself out to the front at the age of seventeen ; the baker at Bodle Street lost his lad, Stacey Collbran of Satanstown had died of wounds, and the late postman at Brownbread Street was reported missing. All these had been struck down together on the ravaged hills round Wytschaete, where the Eighteenth Sussex had for long hours held a trench which the German guns had pounded to a furrow. In this furrow the body of Tom Beatup lay with the bodies

of other Sussex chaps, hostages to shattered Flanders earth for the inviolate Sussex fields.

Mrs. Beatup heard about it from Mus' Archie, who wrote, as she had expected, while Bill Putland wrote to Thyrza. Tom had been shot through the head. His death must have been painless and instantaneous, the Lieutenant told his mother. Then he went on to say how much they had all liked Tom in the platoon, how popular he had been with the men and how the officers had appreciated his unfailing good-humour and reliability. "All soldiers grumble, as you probably know, but I never met one who grumbled less than Beatup; and you could always depend on him to do what was wanted. We shall all miss him more than I can say, but he died bravely in open battle, and we all feel very proud of him."

"Proud"—that was the word they were all throwing at her now: Mus' Archie, the curate, even the minister. They said, "You must be very proud of Tom," just as if all the age-old instincts of her breed did not generate a feeling of shame for one who died out of his bed. Good yeomen died between their sheets, and her son had died out in the mud, like a sheep or a dog—and yet she must be proud of him!

Thyrza was proud—she said as much between her tears. She said that Tom had died like a hero, fighting for his wife and his child.

"He died for England," said Mr. Poulett-Smith.

"He died for Sunday Street," said the Rev. Mr. Sumption. "I reckon that as his eyestrings cracked he saw the corner by the Forge and the oasts of Egypt Farm."

It appeared that Tom had died for a great many things, but in her heart Mrs. Beatup guessed that it was really a very little thing that he had died for—

"Reckon all he saw then wur our faaces," she said to herself.

As there had been so many local deaths, both now and during the winter, it struck the curate to hold a memorial service in the church at Brownbread Street. He knew how the absence of a funeral, of any possibility of paying mortuary honour to the loved ones, would add to the grief of those left behind. So he hastily summoned a protesting and bewildered choir to practise *Æterna Christi Munera*, and announced a requiem for the following Friday.

Mr. Sumption saw in this one more attempt of the church to "get the pull over him," and resolved to contest the advantage. He too would have a memorial service, conducted on godly Calvinistic lines; there should be no Popish prayers for the dead or vain confidence in their eternal welfare, just a sober recollection before God and preparation for judgment.

It was perhaps a tacit confession of weakness that Mr. Sumption did not offer this attraction as a rival to the Church service, but planned to have it later in the same day, so that those with a funeral appetite could attend both. Experience had taught him that what he had to depend on was not so much his flock's conviction as their lack of conviction. The Particular Baptists in Sunday Street, those, that is to say, who for conscience' sake would never worship outside the Bethel, would not fill two pews. He depended for the rest of his congregation on the straying sheep of Ecclesia Anglicana, of the Wesleyans, Primitive Methodists, Ebenezers, Bible Christians, Congregationalists, and other sects that stuck tin roofs about the parish fields.

It occurred to him that perhaps now was his great chance to scatter the rival shepherds, so made his preparations with elaborate care, boldly facing the handicaps his conscience imposed by forbidding him to use decorations, anthems, or instrumental music. He even had a few handbills printed at his own expense, and

canvassed a hopeful popularity by rightly diagnosing the complaint of some sick ewes belonging to Mus' Putland.

4

On Thursday evening he sat in his room at the Horse-lunges, preparing his sermon. Of course his sermons were not written, but he took great pains with their preparation under heads and points. He felt that this occasion demanded a special effort, and it was unfortunate that he felt all muddled and crooked, his thoughts continually springing away from their discipline of heads and racing off on queer adventures, scarcely agreeable to Calvinistic theology.

He thought of those dead boys, some of whom he knew well and others whom he knew but slightly, and he pictured them made perfect by suffering, buying themselves the Kingdom of Heaven by their blood. He knew that his creed gave him no right to do so—Christ died for the elect, and no man can squeeze his way into salvation by wounds and blood. And yet these boys were crucified with Christ. . . . He saw all the crosses of Flanders, a million graves. . . . Perhaps there was a back way to the Kingdom, a path of pain and sacrifice by which sinners won the gate. . . .

He rebuked himself, and bent again to his work. The setting sun poured in from the west, making the little room, with its faded, peeling walls, and mangy furniture, a tub of swimming light. Mr. Sumption had got down to his Fourthly when his thoughts went off again, and this time after a boy who was not dead. It was a couple of months since he had heard from Jerry, and the letter had been unsatisfactory, though by this time he should have learned not to expect so much from Jerry's letters. He lifted his head from the paper with a sigh, and, chin propped on hand, gazed out of the window to where bars

of heavy crimson cloud reefed the blue bay of light. He remembered an evening nearly a year ago, when he and Jerry had sat by the window of a poor lodging-house room in Kemp Town, and felt nearer to each other than before in their lives. . . .

“ Reckon he can’t help it—reckon he’s just a vessel of wrath.”

He bit his tongue as a cure for weakness, and for another ten minutes bobbed and fumed over his notes. The sermon was not going well. He had taken for his text : “ Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble : for the day of the Lord cometh, for it is nigh at hand ; a day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness, as the morning spread upon the mountains.” He told the congregation that their grief for the death of these young men was but part of the universal woe, a spark of that furnace which should devour the world. Melting together in Doomsday fires the Book of Revelation and the Minor Prophets, he pointed out how the Scriptures had been fulfilled . . . the Beast, the False Prophet, the Army from the North, the Star called Wormwood, the Woman on Seven Hills, the Vision of Four Horns, the Crowns of Joshua, the Flying Roll, all these were in the world to-day, Signs in the rolling clouds of smoke that poured from the burning fiery furnace, where only the Children of God could walk unharmed. “ And the Sign of the Son of Man shall be in the heavens. . . . ”

Here it was that again his thoughts became treacherous to his theme. Instead of the Sign of the Son of Man appearing in the heavens, he seemed to see it rising out of the earth, the crosses on the million graves of Flanders. Could it be that Christ was already come ? come in the brave and patient sufferings of boys, who died that the world might live ? . . . “ It is expedient that one man should die for the people.” He drove away the thought as a blasphemy, and stooped once

more to his paper, while his finger rubbed under the lines of his big Bible beside him.

“Sixthly : The Crowns of Joshua. Satan at his right hand. ‘The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan.’ The promise of the Branch. The promise of the Temple. But all must first be utterly destroyed. ‘I will utterly consume all things, saith the Lord.’ Don’t think the War will end before everything is destroyed. ‘That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness.’ The hope of the Elect. ‘I will bring the third part through fire.’ . . .”

There was the rattle and jar of crockery outside the door, and the next minute Mrs. Hubble kicked it open, and brought in the minister’s supper of bread and cocoa. She set it down, ruthlessly sweeping aside his books and paper, and then took a telegram out of her apron pocket.

“This has just come, and the girl’s waiting for an answer.”

Telegrams came only on one errand in the country of the Four Roads, and Mrs. Hubble felt sure that this was to announce either the wounds or death of Jerry. It is true that he might be coming home on leave, but in that case she reckoned he would never trouble to send a telegram—he would just turn up, and give her his room to sweep and his bed to make all on the minute.

She narrowly watched the minister as he read it—if it brought bad news she would like to be able to give the village a detailed account of his reception of it. But he made no sign—only struck her for the first time as looking rather stupid. It was queer that she had never noticed before what a heavy, blunted kind of face he had.

“Any answer?”

He shook his head, and put the telegram face downwards on the tray. Mrs. Hubble flounced out and banged the door.

For some minutes after she had gone Mr. Sumption sat motionless, his arm dangling at his sides, his eyes fixed rather vacantly on the steam rising from the cocoa-jug. The sun had dipped behind the meadow-hills of Bird-in-Eye, and only a few red, fiery rays glowed on the ceiling. Mr. Sumption picked up the telegram and read it again.

"Deeply regret to inform you that Private J. M. Sumption has died at the front."

He felt weak, boneless, as if his joints had been smitten asunder. Something hot and heavy seemed to press down his skull. He could not think, and yet the inhibition was not a respite, but a torment. His ears sang. Every now and then he tried pitifully to collect himself, but failed. Jerry dead . . . Jerry dead . . . then suddenly his head fell forward on his hands, and he began to cry, first weakly, then stormily, noisily, his whole body shaking.

The sobs stopped as suddenly as they had begun, but the brain-pressure had been relieved, and he could now think a little. He saw, as from a great way off, himself before the telegram came—he saw that as he planned that memorial service, prepared that elegiac sermon, there had run in his veins a fiery, subtle pride that he, at least, was the father of a living man. He had not seen it at the time, but he saw it now—now that his pride had been trampled and he himself was in the same abyss with the souls he was to comfort. He too was father of the dead ; Jerry was dead—at last and for ever beyond the reach of his help, his efforts, even his prayers . . . the son of the woman from Ithornden.

The room was almost in darkness now ; fiery lights moved and shifted, and by their glow he read the telegram over again, for at the bottom of his heart was always a sick, insane thought that he must be mistaken, that this blow could not have fallen, that Jerry must still be somewhere alive and up to no good. But the

message was there, and now on this third reading, he noticed something peculiar about the phrasing of it—"Private Sumption has died at the front." Surely this was not the usual form of announcement. He had seen several such messages of woe, and they had read "killed in action" or "died of wounds." He had never seen one put exactly like this.

However, it was not of any real importance. Jerry was dead; that was the only vital, necessary fact. But he would write to Mus' Archie for particulars. . . . The lamp was on the table, and he lit it, pushing aside the unused supper-tray and the littered sermon-paper.

5

He wrote on into the night. He found a certain crookedness in his ideas which made him tear up several efforts—he once even found himself writing to Jerry, a proceeding which struck him with peculiar horror. The hours ticked on; the big constellations swung solemnly across the uncurtained window (luckily Policeman was in bed, and did not see the lozenge of gold lamp-light that lay in Mrs. Hubble's backyard). Inside the room the cat prowled to and fro, miaowling to be let out for a scamper on the barn-roofs—at last, he jumped on the table and, upsetting the cocoa, lapped his fill and retired to dignified repose. The mice tapped on the glass front of their cage with little pink hands like anemones. . . . Mr. Sumption for once did not notice his animals; he sat brooding over the table long after he had finished writing. Then, as the sky was fading into light, and big greyish-white clouds like mushrooms were banking towards the east, he dropped asleep, his head fallen over the back of his chair, with the mouth a little open, his arms hanging at his sides.

The daylight fought with the lamplight, and as with a sudden crimson rift it won the victory, Mr. Sumption

woke—from dreams full of the roaring of a forge and his own arm swung above his head, as in the old days at Bethersden. He sat for a few moments rubbing his eyes, feeling very stiff and cold. Then he realised that he was hungry. The supper-tray was still before him, swimming in cocoa. He ate the bread—dry, because the minister was one of those greedy souls who devour their week's ration of butter in the first three days, and neither jam nor cheese was to be had in Sunday Street, even if he could have afforded them. When he had eaten all the bread, he began to feel thirsty. He longed for a cup of tea. Overhead in the attic there was a trampling, which told him that Mrs. Hubble would soon be down to boil the kettle. He hung about the stairhead till she appeared—shouting back at her father-in-law, who would not get up, and generally in a bad mood for her lodger's service.

However, to his surprise, she was quite obliging—he did not know what his night had made of him. She hurried down to the kitchen to light the fire, and bade him come too and warm himself. Mr. Sumption would have preferred to be alone, but he was beginning to feel very cold, and a kind of weakness was upon him, so he came and sat by her fire, and drank gratefully the big, strong cup of tea she gave him.

"You've had bad news of Mus' Jerry, I reckon," said Mrs. Hubble.

Mr. Sumption nodded, and warmed his hands round the cup. He could not bring himself to say that Jerry was dead.

"This is a tar'ble war," continued Mrs. Hubble, "and I reckon those are best off wot are put out of it"—this was to find out what really had happened to Jerry. "I often think," she added piously, "of the happy lot of the dead—no more trouble, no more pain, no more worriting after absent friends, no more standing in queues. I often think, minister, as it's a pity we aun't all dead."

"Maybe, maybe," said Mr. Sumption.

He rose and walked restlessly out of the kitchen. He both wanted companionship and yet could not bear it. When would the day end—the day that streamed and blew and shone over Jerry's grave? . . . He was going upstairs, when he heard a shuffle of paper behind him, and saw that a letter had been pushed under the door. The post came early to Sunday Street, and Mr. Sumption ran down again, full of an eager, futile hope. The letter bore the familiar field postmark, and at first he thought it was from Jerry, and that he was going to suffer that rending, ecstatic agony of reading letters from the dead. But as he picked it up he saw that the writing was not Jerry's, but in a hand he did not know. Whose could it be?—whosoever it was must be writing about his son. He tore it open as he went up to his room, and at the bottom of the folded paper saw, "Yours, with sincerest sympathy, Archibald Lamb."

Of course, it was Mr. Archie—writing to Jerry's father as he had written to Tom's mother. The minister had had very little to do with the Squire, except on one occasion, when he had met him riding home from a day's hunting, on a badly-lamed horse, and had applied a fomentation which Mr. Archie said had worked a wonderful cure. Now there were two pages covered with his big, firm handwriting. Mr. Sumption pulled them out of the envelope, and from between them a grimy piece of paper fell to the ground, scrawled over with the familiar smudge of indelible pencil.

Mr. Sumption grabbed it, letting Mr. Archie's letter fall in its stead. As he began to read it, he wondered if it had been found on Jerry's body—it was certainly more smeary and stained than usual. After he had read a little, he sat down in his chair. His hand shook, and he stooped his head nearer and nearer to the writing as if his sight were failing him.

“DEAR FATHER,

“By the time you get this I will be out of the way of troubling you any more. I am in great trouble. Mr. Archie said perhaps not tell you, but I said I would rather you knew. It is like this. I kept away in — last time we went up to the trenches, with a lady friend, you may have heard of. Beatup says he told you. Well, I am to be shot for it. I was court-martialled, and they said to be shot. Dear Father, this will make you very sorry, but it cannot be helped, and I am not worth it. I have been a very bad son to you, and done many wicked things besides. Things always were against me. Mr. Archie has been very kind, and so has the pardry here. Mr. Archie is sitting with me to-night, and he says he will stay all night, as I am feeling very much upset at this great trouble. I am leaving you my ring made out of a piece of Zep and my purse, only I am afraid there is no money in it. Please remember me to Ivy Beatup, and say if it had not been for her I should not be here now. I think that is all.

“Ever your loving son,

“JEREMIAH MERIDIAN SUMPTION.

“P.S.—The pardry says Jesus will forgive my sins. Thank you very much, dear father, for those fags you sent. I am smoking one now.”

6

It was nearly half an hour later that Mr. Sumption picked up Archie Lamb's letter. It caught his eye at last as he stared at the floor, and he picked it up and unfolded it. Perhaps it would give him a grain of comfort.

The lieutenant afterwards described it as the most sickening job he had ever had in his life. The usual

letter of condolence and explanation, such as he had over and over again written to parents and wives, became an easy task compared with this. Here he had to deal not only with sorrow, but with disgrace. He could not write, as he had so often written, "We are proud of him." He could not refer back with congratulations to a good record—Jerry had died as he had lived, a bad soldier, a disgrace to the uniform he wore, and there seemed very little that could be decently said about him.

However, the innate kind-heartedness and good feeling of the young officer pulled him successfully through an ordeal that would have staggered many better wits. He began by explaining his reluctance, and that he was writing only because Jerry wished it—though, perhaps, it was better, after all, that his father should know the truth. "As a matter of fact, it is not so dreadful as it sounds. Your son is not to die so much as a punishment as a warning. The shooting of deserters is chiefly a deterrent—and your son is dying so that other men may be warned by his fate to stick to the ranks and do their duty as soldiers; therefore you may say that, indirectly, he is dying for his country. Moreover, his disappearance was not due to cowardice, but to other reasons which you probably know of. I don't know if this mitigates it to you, it certainly does to me. Sumption is not a coward. I have seen him in action, and I repeat that he is as plucky as any one.

"I am sitting with him now, and I want to make your mind easy about the end. When I have finished writing this he will be given his supper, food and a hot drink. Then he will go to sleep. He will be roused just ten minutes before the time, and hurried off, still half-asleep—he will never be quite awake. There will be no awful apprehension and agony, such as I expect you imagine—please don't worry about that.

"I have not been able to get him a padre of his own

church, but a very good Congregational man has been with him, and has, of course, respected your convictions in every way.

"Now before I end up, I want to say again that it isn't really as bad as it looks—the disgrace, I mean. Think of your son as having died so that other men should take warning by him and not desert the ranks, and, therefore, in that sense he has died for his country."

Then Archie Lamb asked Mr. Sumption to write to him if there was anything more he wanted to know, and said that he would forward Jerry's purse and ring at the first opportunity. After the signature was added: "It is all over now, and happened as I told you. He was still half asleep, and suffered practically nothing."

7

For some minutes Mr. Sumption sat with his head buried in his hands. Before his closed eyes he saw pass the last pitiful act of Jerry's tragedy. He saw him standing defiant and furtive—he would always look defiant and furtive, even if half awake—with his back to the wall . . . then—cr-r-rack!—and he would fall down at the foot of it in a crumpled heap, that perhaps still moved a little. . . . But he had suffered nothing . . . practically nothing. . . .

Then he saw Jerry standing all his life with his back to a wall, every man armed against him. He had but died as he had lived. Even his own father had been against him, had misused and misunderstood him. There had never been anyone to understand that mysterious, troubled heart, anyone who could have understood it—except, perhaps, Meridian Hearn, his mother—and that queer people of defiant furtive ways, whose dark blood had run in his veins and been his ruin. Meridian Hearn should not have married the *gaujo* preacher from Bethersden—she should have married

one of her own race, and then her child would have lived among those of like passions as he, and not among strangers, who had mobbed him and pecked his eyes out, like sparrows attacking a foreign bird.

"Oh, Meridian, Meridian!—our boy's dead. . . ."

There was the familiar clatter and kick outside the door, and Mrs. Hubble came in with the breakfast tray. Her face was crimson and very much excited, though she tried to work it into lines of woe; for she had at last heard the news about Jerry, from Gwen Bournier, who had heard it from Mrs. Bill Putland, who had had a letter from her husband that morning. All Sunday Street now knew that Jerry Sumption had been shot as a deserter, having given the 18th Sussex the slip on the eve of the action in which Tom Beatup and Fred Bournier and Stacey Collbran and other local boys had given up their limbs and lives—he had gone to a French woman, and been found in a blouse and wooden shoes. The platoon would not miss him much, Bill Putland said; but he was unaccountable sorry for his father.

So, to do her justice, was Mrs. Hubble. She had put an extra spoonful of tea in his teapot, and had boiled him an egg, a luxury which was not included in his boarding fees. Moreover, she gave him a pitying glance, as she swept the litter of sermon-paper to one side.

"Will you want me to tell people?" she asked him.

"Tell people what?" His voice came throatily, like an old man's.

"Well, I reckon you woan't be preaching to-night?"

Something in her voice made him start up, and pull himself together. He saw her squinting compassionately at him, with the corner of her apron in readiness.

"Preach!—Why do you ask that?"

"I've heard about your loss. I reckon you woan't be feeling in heart for preaching."

He did not reply.

"I cud easy stick up a notice on the chapel door,"

she continued, "and all the folkses hereabouts ud understand. They'd never expect you to spik after wot's happened."

"Woman!—what has happened?"

He spoke so suddenly and so loudly, that Mrs. Hubble started, and dropped the corner of her apron.

"I—I . . . well, we've all of us heard, Mus' Sumption. . . ."

"Heard what?"

"I—I . . . Doan't look at me like that, minister, for the Lord's sake."

"Speak, then. What have you all heard?"

Mrs. Hubble was recovering from her alarm and beginning to resent his manner.

"Well, reckon we've heard wot you've heard—as your boy's bin shot fur deserting his regiment; and no one expects you to come and preach in chapel after that."

A wave of burning crimson went over Mr. Sumption's face, so that Mrs. Hubble said afterwards she thought as he'd go off in a stroke. Then he was suddenly white again, and speaking quietly, but in a voice that somehow frightened her more than his shouting.

"I shall certainly preach to-night. I will not have the service cancelled. Tell everyone who asks you that I shall certainly preach."

"Very good, sir."

She edged towards the door.

"Mrs. Hubble! Stop a moment. Say this, too. I am not ashamed of my son. I reckon you all think I am ashamed of him, and you are putting your heads together and clacking, and pitying me for it. But I am not ashamed. He died for England. Mr. Archie himself says it. These are his very words: Wait!"—for Mrs. Hubble was going to bolt.

"I'm waiting, Mus' Sumption."

"He says, 'Think of your son as having died so that

other men should take warning by him and not desert the ranks, and, therefore, in that sense he has died for his country.' Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then you can go."

Mrs. Hubble fled.

8

All that morning heavy pacings over her head convinced Mrs. Hubble that the minister was preparing a wonderful sermon. She generally guessed the temper of his discourse by the weight and width of the stumpings which preceded it. To-day she could hear him, as she expressed it, all over the room . . . he was kicking the fire-irons . . . he had overturned his chair . . . he had flung up the window and banged it down again. Obviously something great was in process, and at the same time she felt that Mr. Sumption was rather mad. It was nothing short of indecent for him to preach to-night, after what had happened—and the queer way he had spoken about Jerry, too. . . .

By this time the whole of Sunday Street knew about Jerry. He was discussed at breakfast-tables, in barns, on doorsteps, on milking-stools. No one was surprised; indeed, most people seemed to have foretold his bad end. "I said as he'd come to no good, that gipsy's brat." "A valiant minister wot can't breed up his own son." "Howsumdever, I'm middling sorry fur the poor chap; I'll never disremember how he saaved that cow of mine wot wur dying of garget." "And I'm hemmed, maaster, if he wurn't better wud my lambing ewes than my own looker, surelye."

On the whole, the news improved his chances of a congregation. It was a better advertisement than the notice on the church door, or even than his veterinary achievement at Egypt Farm. Some "wanted to see how he took it," others openly admired his pluck; all were

stirred by curiosity and also by compassion. During the years he had lived among them he had grown dear to them and rather contemptible. They looked down on him for his shabbiness, his poverty, his pastoral blundering, his lack of education ; but they liked him for his willingness, his simplicity, his sturdy good looks, his strong muscles, his knowledge of cattle and horses.

All that morning people wavered up the street towards the Horselunges, and looked at it, and at the Bethel. Sometimes they gathered together in little groups, but always some way off. The Bethel stared blindly over the roof of the Horselunges, as if it ignored the misery huddled at its doors. No matter what might be the private sorrows of its servant, he must come to-night and preach within its walls those iron doctrines of Doomsday and Damnation in whose honour it had been built and had stood staring over the fields with the blind eyes of a corpse for a hundred years.

Towards noon Thyrza Beatup came up the street, walking briskly, with her weeds flapping behind her. It was the first time she had been out since her widowing, and people stared at her from their doors as she walked boldly up to Horselunges and knocked.

"How is poor Mus' Sumption?" she asked Mrs. Hubble.

"Lamentaable, lamentaable," said Mrs. Hubble, with eye and apron in conjunction.

"Well, please tell him as Mrs. Tom Beatup sends her kind remembrances and sympathy, and she reckons she knows wot he feels, feeling the saum herself."

"Very good, Mrs. Beatup."

"And you'll be sure and give it all wot I said—about feeling the saum myself?"

"Oh, sartain."

Thyrza walked off. Her face was very white and wooden. Mrs. Hubble stared after her.

"Middling pretty as golden-haired women look in

them weeds. . . . Feels the saum as Mus' Sumption, does she? That's queer, seeing as Tom died lik Onward Christian Soldiers, and Jerry lik a dog. Howsumdever, I mun give her words . . . maybe he'll be fool enough to believe them."

The day was warm and misty, without much sun. The sky above the woods was yellowish, like milk, and the air smelt of rain. But the rain did not come till evening. Mr. Poulett-Smith's congregation assembled dry, and nobody's black was spoiled on the way home. In spite of this, the service was not thickly attended. The advertisement which Jerry Sumption's death had given the Bethel madé those who had time or inclination for only one church-going decide to put it off until the evening. Only a few assembled to hear the curate pray that the souls they commemorated—among which he was not afraid to include Jerry—might be brought by Saint Michael, the standard-bearer, into the holy light.

On the other hand, the Bethel was crowded, and by this time it was raining hard. The air was thick with the steaming of damp clothes. The lamps shuddered and smoked in the draught of the rising wind, and the big, blinded windows were running down with rain, as if they wept for the destruction of the chapel weed. . . .

Never had the Rev. Mr. Sumption such a congregation. Nearly the whole of Sunday Street jostled in the pews. Instead of the meagre peppering of heads, there were tight rows of them, like peas in pods. All the Beatups were there, except Nell, who had stayed at home to look after the house; even Mus' Beatup had hobbled over on his stick. The Putlands were there, and Mrs. Bill Putland, and the Sindens and the Bourners and the Hubbles. Thyrsa had come, with little Will asleep in her arms—she sat near the back, in case she should have to take him out. The Hollowbones had come from the Foul Mile and the Kadwells from Stilliands Tower; there were Collbrans from Satanstown, Viners from

Puddledock, Ades from Bodle Street, and even stragglers from Brownbread Street and Dallington. Most of them had never been in the Bethel before, and it struck them as unaccountable mean, with its smoking lamps and windows flapping with dingy blinds, its pews that smelled of wood-rot, and its walls all peeled and scarred with moisture and decay.

There was a rustle and scrape as Mr. Sumption came in, through the little door behind the pulpit. Then there was silence as he stood looking down, apparently unmoved, on what must have been to him an extraordinary sight—his church crowded, full to the doors, as he had so often dreamed, but never seen. He looked pale and languid, and his eyes were like smoky lanterns. His voice also seemed to have lost its ring as he gave out the number of the psalm, and then in the prayer which followed it. Moreover, though the congregation, being mostly new, shuffled and kicked its heels disgracefully, he thumped at no one.

"Pore soul, he shudn't ought to have tried it," thought Thyrza to herself in her corner. "He'll never get through."

After the prayer, which was astonishingly nerveless for a prayer of Mr. Sumption's, came a hymn, during which the minister sat in the pulpit, his hand over his face. Those in the front rows saw his jaws work as if he was praying. People whispered behind their Bibles—"He's different, surely—just lik a Church parson to-night." "Reckon it's changed him—knocked all the beans out of him, as you might say." "Pore chap, he looks middling tired—reckon he finds this a tar'ble job."

Then the singing stopped, and Mr. Sumption stood up, wearily turning over the leaves of his big Bible.

"Brethren, you will find my text in the Eleventh of John, the fiftieth verse: 'It is expedient that one man should die for the people.'"

9

The sermon began with the unaccustomed flatness of the rest of the service. Mr. Sumption's voice had lost its resonance, his arms no longer waved like windmill-sails, nor did his joints crack like dried osiers. He made his points languidly on his fingers, instead of thumping them out on the pulpit with his fist. The congregation would have been disappointed if they had not known the reason for this slackness ; as things were, it was part of the spectacle. They noticed, too, a certain bitterness that crept into his speech now and then, as when he described the Chief Priests and Scribes plotting together to take refuge behind the sacrifice of Christ. "It is expedient for us . . . that the whole nation perish not."

"Brethren, I see them nodding their ugly beards together, and saying : ' Let this young man go and die for us. One man must die for the people, and it shan't be one of us, I reckon—we're too important, we can't be spared. Let us send this young man to his death. It is expedient that he should die for the nation.' "

Then suddenly he stiffened his back, bringing his open Bible together with a thud, while his voice rang out with the old clearness :

"Reckon that was what you said among yourselves when you saw the young men we're thinking of to-night go up before the Tribunal, or volunteer at the Recruiting Office. You said to yourselves, ' That's right, that's proper. It is expedient that these young men should go and die for the people. I like to see a young man go to fight for his country. I'm too old . . . I've got a bad leg . . . but I like to see the young men go.' "

For a moment he stood and glared at them, as in the old days, his eyes like coals, his big teeth bared like a fighting dog's. Then once again his weariness dropped over him, his head hung, and his sentences ran together, husky and indistinct.

The congregation shuffled and coughed. The service required peppermint-sucking to help it through, and owing to war conditions no peppermints were forthcoming. Zacky Beatup made a rabbit out of his handkerchief and slid it over the back of the pew at Lily Sinden. Mus' Beatup began to calculate the odds against the Bethel closing before the Rifle Volunteer. Old Mus' Hollowbone from the Foul Mile crossed his legs and went to sleep, just as if he was sitting with the Wesleyans. Then Maudie Sinden pulled a screw of paper out of her pocket and extracted a piece of black gum—the very piece she had taken out of her mouth on entering the chapel, knowing that no sweet had ever been sucked there since Tommy Bournier was bidden “spue forth that apple of Sodom” two years ago. Thyrza had never seen a congregation so demoralised, but then she had never seen a minister so dull, so drony, so lack-lustre, so lifeless. “He shudn’t ought to have tried it, poor chap,” she murmured into the baby’s shawl.

Then suddenly Mr. Sumption’s fist came down on his Bible. The pulpit lamps shuddered, and rattled their glass shades, and the congregation started into postures of attention, as the minister glared up and down the rows of heads in the pod-like pews.

“Reckon you’ve no heart for the Gospel to-day,” he said severely. “Pray the Lord to change your hearts, as He changed my sermon. This is not the sermon I had meant to preach to you, and if you don’t like it, it is the Lord’s doing. I had for my text : ‘The day of the Lord is at hand, as the morning spread upon the mountains.’ That was my text, and I had meant to warn you all of the coming of that day, as I have so often warned you. It is a day which shall burn like an oven, and the strong man shall cry therein mightily ; it is a day of darkness and gloominess, of clouds and thick darkness. Then I was going forward to show you how the Sign of the Son of Man shall be in the heavens, and

how He shall appear in clouds with great glory. . . . But the Lord came then and smote me, and I lay as dead before Him, like Moses in the Mount. And when I came to myself, I knew that the Sign of the Son of Man is already with us here—not in heaven, but on earth—rising up out of the earth . . . over there in France—the crosses of the million Christs you have crucified.”

They were all listening now. He could see their craning, attentive faces, and their kicks and coughs had died down into a rather scandalised silence.

“The million Christs you have crucified, all those boys you sent out to die for the people. You sent them in millions to die for you and for your little children, and their blood shall be on you and on your children. Oh, you stiff-necked and uncircumcised—talking of Judgment as if it was a great way off, and behold it is at your doors; and the Christ Whom you look for has come suddenly to His temple—in the suffering youth of this country—all countries—in these boys who go out and suffer and die and bleed, cheerfully, patiently, like sheep—that the whole nation perish not.

“Think of the boys you have sent, the boys we’re specially remembering here to-day. There was Tom Beatup—a good honest lad, simple and clean as a little child. He went out to fight for you, but I reckon you never woke up in your comfortable bed and said: ‘There’s poor Tom Beatup, up to the loins in mud, and freezing with cold, and maybe as empty as a rusty pail.’ The thought of him never spoiled your night’s rest, and you never felt, ‘I’ve got to struggle tooth and nail to be worth his sacrificing himself like that for an old useless trug like me, and I’ll do my best to help my country at home in any way as it can be done, so as the War ull be shortened and Tom ull have a few nights less in the mud.’ That’s what you ought to have said, but I reckon you didn’t say it.

“There’s Stacey Collbran, too, who left a young

sweetheart, and ull never know the love of wedded life because you had to be died for. Do you ever think of him when your wife lies in your bosom, and say, ' Reckon I'll be good to my wife, since for my sake a poor chap never had his ' ?

" And there's Fred Bourner, and Sid Viner, and Joe Kadwell, and Leslie Ades—they all went out to die for you, and they died, and you come here to remember them to-night ; but in your hearts, which ought to be breaking with reverence and gratitude, you're just saying, ' It's proper, it's expedient that these men should die for the people, that the whole nation perish not.'

" And there's my boy. . . ."

The minister's voice hung paused for a minute. He leaned over the pulpit, his hands gripping the wood till their knuckles stood out white from the coarse brown. His eyes travelled up and down the pew-pods of staring heads, as if he expected to see contradiction or mockery or surprise. But the Sunday Street face is not expressive, and except for the utter stillness, Mr. Sumption might have been reading the chapel accounts.

" There's my boy, Jerry Sumption. Maybe you thought I wouldn't talk of him to-night, that I'd be ashamed, that I'd never dare mention his name along of your gallant boys. Besides, you say, what's he got to do with it ? He never died for the people. But you thought wrong. I'm not ashamed to speak his name along of Tom and Stace and Fred and Sid and Joe, and he hasn't got nothing to do with it, either. For I tell you—*my boy died for your boys*. He died as an example and warning to them, to save them from a like fate, and if that isn't dying for them. . . . These are Mr. Archie Lamb's very words : ' Your son is dying so that other men may be warned by his fate and stick to the ranks and do their duty as soldiers ; therefore, in that sense he has died for his country.' I reckon it seems a big thing to shoot a boy just for going off to see his girl

when the company's marching ; but if it weren't done, then other boys ud stop away and the regiment go to pieces. Mr. Archie and the other officers said, ' It is expedient that one man should die for the regiment, that the whole army perish not.' . . .

" No ! I am not ashamed of my boy ! If he was led astray at the last moment by his evil, human passions, who shall judge him ?—Not I, and not you. He did not desert because he was a coward, because he funk'd the battle before him. Listen again to Mr. Archie Lamb ; he says, ' Sumption is not a coward—I have seen him in action, and I repeat that he is as plucky as any one.' And he joined up as a volunteer, too—he didn't have to be fetched, he didn't go before the Tribunal and say he'd got a bad leg, or a bad arm, and his father couldn't run the business without him. He joined up out of free-will and love of his country. The Army was no place for him, for his blood was the blood of the Rossarmes-croes or Hearn's, which knows not obedience. When he joined he risked his life not only at the hands of the enemy but at the hands of his own countrymen, and it is his own countrymen that have put him to death, ' that the whole nation perish not.'

" I tell you, my boy died for your boys ; my boy died for you, and you shall not look down on his sacrifice. Over his grave is the Sign of the Son of Man, Who gave His life as a ransom for many. To save your boys from the possibility of a disgrace such as his my boy died in shame. When they see the grave of Jerry Sumption they will say : ' That is the grave of a man who died because he could not obey laws or control passions, because he was not master of his own blood. Therefore let us take heed by him and walk warily, and do our duty as soldiers ; and if we must die, not die as he died. . . . ' So my son died for your sons, and my son and your sons died for you ; and I ask you : ' Are you worth dying for ? ' "

Again the minister was silent, staring down at the

rows of wooden, expressionless faces, now faintly a-sweat in the steam and heat of the Bethel. Then suddenly he burst out at them, loudly, impatiently :

“ I’ll tell you the truth about yourselves. I’ll tell you if you’re worth dying for. What has this War meant to you ? What have you done for this War ? There’s just one answer to both questions. Nothing. While men were fighting for their own and your existence, while they were suffering horrors out there in France which you can’t think of, and if you could think of could not speak of, you were just muddling about there in your little ways, thinking of nothing but crops and prices and the little silly inconveniences you had to put up with. Ho ! I reckon you never thought of the War, except when you got some cheery letter from your boy, telling you he was having the time of his life out there, or when the price of bread went up, or you had to eat margarine instead of butter, or you couldn’t get your Sunday joint. All that war meant to you was new orders about lights, and tribunals taking your farm-hands, and prices going up and food getting scarce, and the War Agricultural Committee leaving Cultivation orders. And all the time you grumbled and groused, and wrote out to your boys that you were dying of want, weakening their hearts—they who wrote you kind and cheery letters out of the gates of hell. You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears ! You little, little souls, that only bother about the little concerns of your little parish in the middle of this great woe. The end of the world is come, and you know it not ; Christ is dying for you and you heed Him not. Are you worth dying for ? Are you worth living for ? No—you’re scarce worth preaching at.”

By this time there were signs of animation among the pea-pods. The peas rolled from side to side, and a faint rustle of indignation came from them.

“ I know why you’re here to-night,” continued

Mr. Sumption. " You've come to gaze on me, to watch me in my trouble, to see how I take it. You haven't come to hear the Gospel—you yawned and wriggled all the time I was preaching it. You haven't come just to think of the dead boys—you did that in church this morning. You're here to gaze at me, to see how I take it. Well, now you see how I take it. You see I'm not ashamed. Why should I be ashamed of my son ? He's worth a bundle of you—he's died a better death than anyone in this church is likely to die ; and if he lived a vessel of wrath, at all events he was a full vessel, not just a jug of emptiness. He lived like the wild man he was born, and he died like a poor wild animal shot down. But I am not ashamed of him. And though he died without baptism, without conversion, without assurance, I cannot and I will not believe that he is lost. Somewhere the love of God is holding him. The Lord tells me that my fatherhood is only a poor mess of His ; well, in that case, I reckon He won't cast out my lad. Willingly I'd bear his sins for him, and so I reckon Christ will bear them even for the child of wrath. Where I can love, He can love more, and since He died as a felon, reckon He feels for my poor boy. He knows what it is to stand with His back to the wall and see every man's hand raised against Him, and every man's tongue stuck out. And because He knows, He understands, and because He understands, He forgives. Amen."

The windows of the Bethel shook mournfully in the wind, and the rain hissed down them, as if it shuddered and wept to hear such doctrine within its walls. But the sounds were lost in the shuffle of the rising congregation, standing up to sing the psalm.

That night the minister did not stand at the door to shake hands with the departing congregation.

Beatups, Putlands, Sindens, Hubbles, Bourners, jostled their way unsaluted into the darkness, groping with umbrellas, fumbling into cloaks. But even the rain could not prevent an exchange of indignation. People formed themselves into clumps and scurried together over the wet road. From every clump voices rose in expostulation and resentment.

"To think as I'd live to be insulted in church!"

"Reckon he'd never dare say half that in a plaace whur folkses' tongues wurn't tied to answer him."

"Maade out as we thought only of our insides," said Mrs. Sinden. "Seemingly he never thinks of his, when all the village knows he wur trying the other day to maake Mrs. Tom give him a tin of salmon fur ninepence instead of one-and-three."

"And she did it, too," said Mrs. Putland.

"It's twice," said Mrs. Beatup, "as he called me stiff-necked and uncircumcised, and I reckon I aun't neither."

"And he said I wur lik an empty jug," said Mus' Beatup.

"And his Jerry's worth a bundle of us," laughed Mus' Sinden.

"Wot vrothers me," wheezed old Father-in-law Hubble, "is that to the best of my hearing I heard him maake out as Christ died fur all."

"And why shudn't he?" asked Mus' Putland.

"Because Mus' Sumption's paid seventy pound a year to teach as Christ died for the Elect, and so he always has done till to-night."

"Well, seemingly thur wurn't much Elect in gipsy Jerry, so he had to change his mind about that. Reckon he had to git Jerry saaved somehow."

"But he'd no call to chaange the Divine council—I've half a mind to write to the Assembly about it."

"Wot sticks in my gizzard," said Mus' Bourner, "is that to hear him you'd think as we're all to blame for

Jerry's going wrong, while I tell you it's naun but his own mismanaging and bad breeding-up of the boy. 'Bring up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.' That's Bible, but it's sense too. It's all very praaper for Minister to stick by the young boy now and say he aun't ashaumed of him, but if only he'd brought him up Christian and not spoiled him, reckon he'd never have bin called upon to stand thur and say it."

There were murmurs and assenting "Surelyes."

"He spoiled that boy summat tar'ble," continued the smith. "Cudn't say No to him, and let him have his head justabout shocking. Then maybe he'd git angry when the young chap had disgraced him, and hit him about a bit. But thur aun't no sense in that, nuther. Wot Jerry wanted wur a firm, light hand and no whip—and Mus' Sumption ud have been the fust to see it if Jerry had bin a horse."

"Well, he's got his punishment now," said Mrs. Putland. "Poor soul, my heart bleeds for him."

"Howsumdever, he'd no call to insult us," said Mrs. Sinden, "and I fur one ull never set foot agaun in that Bethel as long as I live."

Thyrza Beatup did not walk with the others. Her grief was still too raw, and Mr. Sumption's words about Tom had made her cry. She carried Will under her cloak, walking quickly over the wet ruts, home to the fire before which she would undress him and put him to bed. Mr. Sumption's sermon had not had the same effect on her as on the others—for one thing, she thought of Tom more than of Jerry; for another, her feeling towards the minister was of pure compassion. Poor chap! how he must have suffered, how he must have hated all those who mourned honourably, who grieved for heroes and saints, such as her Tom. What would she have felt, she wondered, if Tom had died like Jerry? . . .

She wished she could have seen Mr. Sumption after the service, and asked him in to a bit of supper. Poor soul! one could always comfort him through his inside. She was glad Tom had been to see him on his last leave . . . he had spoken very nicely of Tom.

She came to the little house, all blurred into the darkness, with the rain scudding before it. A pale, blue light hung under the clouds from the hidden moon, and was faintly reflected in the gleaming wet of the roadway. Thyrza fumbled for her key, and let herself into the shop. The firelight leaped to meet her. As she turned to shut the door, she saw a man go quickly past, head sloped, shoulders hunched against the wind.

II

Mr. Sumption felt he could not stay indoors—he could not bear the thought of sitting long hours, harassed and lonely, in that shabby, wind-thridden study of his, with the peeled wall-paper flapping in the draught and the rain cracking on the windows. Besides, he would have to face a personal encounter with Mrs. Hubble, and weather the storm of her wrath at being “preached at”; more than once she had thought fit to give him a piece of her mind when the sermon had affronted her. The tongue of a scolding woman was an anti-climax he dared not face, so he let himself out of the little door at the back of the chapel, and, turning up his collar, marched away against the rain.

He had no exact idea where he was going. All he knew was that he wanted to get away from Sunday Street, from the people who had come to stare at him in his trouble. A lump of rage rose in his throat and choked him, and tears of rage burned at the back of his eyes. He saw the rows of stolid faces, the greased heads, the stupid bonnets. There they had sat and wagged in judgment on him and his boy. There they had sat,

the people who were content to be suffered and died for by the boys in Flanders, while they stayed at home and grumbled. Well, thank the Lord he had told them what they were ! Ho ! he had given it to them straight—he had made their ears burn !

He walked on and on, cracking his joints with fury. He had turned into the East Road at Pont's Green, and was now hurrying southward, head down, to meet the gale. There was something in the flogging and whirling of the wind which stimulated him ; he found relief in pushing against the storm, in swallowing the rain that beat upon his lips and trickled down his face. He would walk till he was tired, and then he would find some sheltered place to go to sleep. Only through exhaustion could he hope to find sleep to-night. It would be horrible to lie and toss in stuffy sheets, while the darkness pressed down his eyeballs and at last the dawn crept mocking round the window. . . . It did not matter if he stopped out all night ; he did not care what people thought of him—he had burned his boats.

The moon was still pale under the clouds, and the wet road gleamed like pewter. The hedges roared, as the wind moved in them, and every now and then he could hear the swish of a great tree, or the cracking and crying of a wood. In the midst of all this tumult he felt very lonely—if he passed a farm, with slats of lamp-light under its blinds, he felt more lonely still. But it was better than the loneliness of a room, of the room to which someone he loved would never come again. He had a sudden memory of Jerry as he had seen him, the morning after the boy's own night out of doors, sitting like a monkey in the big wash-tub in front of the fire. . . .

It must have been between two and three o'clock in the morning when Mr. Sumption found the road leading past the gape of a big barn. By this time his legs were aching with cold and wet, and his face felt all raw with

the sting of the rain. It would be good to take shelter for a little while. Then he would go home, and brave Mrs. Hubble. He would be back in his study when she brought in his breakfast. Breakfast . . . he rubbed his big hands together, he was already beginning to feel hungry. But before he went home he must rest. That weariness which had muffled him like a cloak in the chapel, fumbling his movements and veiling his eyes, was dropping over him now. He felt the weight of it in his limbs, and, worse still, in his heart and brain. When he shut his eyes he saw nothing but rows of heads, staring and wagging. . . . He went into the barn, and the sudden stopping of the wind and rain made him feel dazed. Then a queer thing happened—he pitched forward on his face into a pile of straw, not giddy, not fainting, merely fast asleep.

12

For some hours he slept heavily in his pitched, huddled attitude, but as the cloud of sleep lightened before waking, he had another dream of the old forge at Bethersden, and of himself working there, in the days before the "voices" came. He saw the great red glow of the forge spread out over the cross-roads, fanning up the road to Horsmonden and the road to Witsunden and the road to Castweasel. He saw the smithy full of it, and himself and his father working in it, with arms swung over the glowing iron—he heard the roar of the furnace and the thump of the hammers; and a great fulness of peace was in his heart. Dimly conscious in his dream of all that had passed since those happy days, he felt a wonderful relief at being back in them, and the sweetest doubt as to the reality of his later experiences. . . . So it had been a dream, all his ministerial trouble and travail, his brief snatch at love, his son's birth in sorrow and life in defiance and death in

shame. . . . The hammers swung, and the forge roared, and the light fanned up to the stars. . . .

Then he woke, with the roar and thump still in his ears, for his head hung down over the straw below the level of his body. All his limbs were cramped, and he found it difficult to rise. The first despair of waking was upon him, and he wished he could have died in his dream. Bright sunshine was streaming into the barn, lighting up its dark old corners where the cobwebs hung like lace. Framed in the big doorway was a green hill freckled with primroses and cuckoo flowers, with broom bushes budding against a thick blue sky that seemed to drip with sunshine.

He stumbled out into the stroke of the wind, now scarcely enough to ripple the big rain puddles that lay blue and glimmering in the road. He was in a part of the country he did not know, doubtless beyond the frontiers of the Four Roads, in some by-lane behind Rushlake Green.

Though it was too late, he felt that even now he could not go back to Sunday Street. He shrank from meeting human beings, especially those who had sat before him in rows like pea-pods last night. Oh, those heads ! he would never forget them, how they had stared and rolled. . . . He turned away from the road, and went up the rising ground behind the barn. It was a spread of wild land, some common now in its spring bloom of gorse and violets. He threw himself down upon the turf, and for a few minutes lay motionless, with the sun gently steaming his damp crumpled clothes.

He longed to be back in his dream, back in the red glow of the furnace, back at the old cross-roads in Kent. A sense of great cruelty and injustice was upon him. Why had the Lord called him from the work he loved, away to unknown cares and sorrows, to a life for which he was not fitted ? It even seemed to him that if only he had been left a blacksmith this tragedy of Jerry

would not have happened . . . if Jerry had never been in the impossible, grotesque situation of "a clergyman's son." . . . Why had the Lord sent voices, which never came now, which, indeed, had not come since his marriage? Why had the Lord raised up the minister at Tenterden, to send him to a training college and try to make him what he never could be, a gentleman? He was no minister—only a poor image of one, which everybody laughed at. He had had qualms and doubts before this, but he had put them from him; now he was too exhausted, too badly bruised and beaten, to deceive himself any further. He was no minister of God—he could hardly, after a twelve years' pastorate, scrape together a congregation; people went anywhere but to the Particular Baptists. They never asked for his ministrations at sick-beds, they hardly ever came to him to be married or buried, as if they doubted the efficacy of these rites at his hands; he had not performed one baptism in the last five years, and the only time his church had been full was when they had all come to gaze on him, to see how he bore his trouble. On the other hand, if a man had a sick sheep or an ailing cow, or if his horse went lame or spoiled his knees, he called him in at once. That ought to have shown him. He was not a minister but a farrier, and the people of Sunday Street knew it, and treated him accordingly.

He lay with his face hidden against the grass. It seemed as if his life had stopped like a watch, leaving him, like a stopped watch, still in being. Jerry, the centre and spring of his existence for twenty years, was gone; his ministry was gone—he could not go back after what had happened, and no brethren would call him elsewhere. He could not stay on at Sunday Street or return to the forge at Bethersden. Here he was, past middle age, without friends, without kin, without livelihood, without resources of any kind. He saw

himself alone in a world burning and crashing to ruin, a world that bristled with the crosses of martyred boys and was black with the dead hopes of their fathers.

A sob broke from him, but without tears. His being seemed dried up. The horror of thick darkness was upon him, of this blasted world rocking and staggering to the pit, of the flame which devoured all, good and bad, elect and damned, wheat and weeds. Who could endure to the end of this Judgment? Who hoped to be saved? All was burnt up, dried, and blasted. The day of the Lord had come indeed and had consumed him like a dry stick.

"My soul is full of troubles and my life draweth nigh unto the grave.

"I am counted with them that go down into the pit.

"Free among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave, whom Thou rememberest no more.

"Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps.

"Thy wrath lieth hard upon me, and thou hast vexed me with thy waves.

"Thy fierce wrath goeth over me; thy terrors have cut me off.

"Lover and friend hast thou put from me, and mine acquaintance into darkness."

13

His hands clenched on the young grass, slowly dragging out bunches of tender, growing things. He began to smell the sweetness of their roots, of the soil that clung to them—moist, full of sap and growth, of inevitable rebirth. These budding, springing things, growing out of deadness into life and warmth, suddenly gave him a little piteous thrill of joy, which broke into his despair like a trickle of rain into dry sods. The earth seemed to hold a steadfast hope in her stillness and strength, in her

scent and moisture and green life struggling out of death. . . . Those boys who had cast themselves down on the earth to die, perhaps they had found this hope . . . perhaps disgraced Jerry slept with it. No man, no blood-lusty power, could cheat them of it, for even bodies blown into a thousand pieces the earth takes into her kind stillness and makes them whole in union with herself.

Even in the Valley of the Shadow of Death, the earth had not failed him. No one could separate him from her or cheat him of his reward in her. From her he had come and to her he would return, and in her he would be one with those whom he had lost, his dead wife and his dead son. There should be no disgrace there, nor torment, nor tears, nor sighing ; no parting, when all are united in the one element and the children are asleep together on the mother's breast. . . .

14

An hour later Mr. Sumption had left the green hill and was walking towards a little hamlet that showed its gables at the bend of the lane. Now that his grief was spent, drunk up by the earth like a storm, he remembered that he was hungry, and set out to hunt for food. There was an inn at the beginning of the street, a low house slopped with yellow paint and swinging the sign of the Star across the road. Mr. Sumption walked in and asked the landlady for breakfast ; then, upon her stare, changed his demand to dinner, whereat she told him that the Star did not give dinners, and that there was a war on. However, he managed at last to persuade her to let him have some dry bread and tea, and a quarter of an hour later he was making the best of them in a little green, sunless parlour, rather pleasantly stuffy with the ghosts of bygone pipes and pots.

The room was in the front of the house, and the

shadow of the inn lay across the road, licking the bottom of the walls of the houses opposite. Above it they rose into a yellow glare of sunshine, and their roofs were bitten against a heavy blue sky. From quite near came the pleasant chink of iron, and craning his head he saw the daubed colours of a smith and wheelwright on a door a little further down the street. It comforted him to think that there should be a smith so near him, and all through his meal he listened to the clink and thud, with sometimes the clatter of new-shod hoofs in the road.

When he had finished his dinner and paid his shilling he went out and up beyond the shadow of the inn to the smith's door. The name of the hamlet was Lion's Green, and he gathered he was some ten miles from home, beyond Horeham and Mystole. It would not take him more than a couple of hours to get back with his great stride, so there was time for him to linger and put off the evil hour when he must confront Mrs. Hubble and explain why he had been out all night. Meantime he would go and watch the smith.

There was no house opposite the forge, and the doorway was full of sunshine, which streamed into the red glare of the furnace. Mr. Sumption stood in the mixing light, a tall black figure, leaning against the doorpost. He had smoothed his creased and grass-stained clothes a little, and taken out the straws that had stuck in his hair, but he always looked ill-shaved at the best of times, and to-day his face was nearly swallowed up in his beard. The smith was working single-hand, and had no time to stare at his visitor. He wondered a little who he was, for though he wore black clothes like a minister, he was in other respects more like a tramp.

"Good afternoon," said Mr. Sumption suddenly.

"Good afternoon," said the smith, hesitating whether he should add "sir," but deciding not to.

"You seem pretty busy."

"Reckon I am—unaccountable busy. I'm aloan now—my man went last week. Thought I wur saafe wud a man of forty-eight, but now they raise the age limit to fifty, and off he goes into the Veterinary Corps."

"Shall I give you a hand?"

The smith stared.

"I've done a lot of smith's work," continued Mr. Sumption eagerly. "There's nothing I can't do with hoof and iron."

The smith hesitated; then he saw the visitor's arms as he took off his coat and began to roll up his sleeves.

"Well, maybe . . . if you know aught . . . there's the liddle cob thur wants a shoe."

A few men and boys were in the smithy, and they looked at each other and whispered a little. They had never seen such swingeing, hairy arms as Mr. Sumption's.

A smile was fighting its way across the stubble on the minister's face. He cracked his joints with satisfaction, and soon the little cob was shod by as quick, as merciful, and as sure a hand as had ever touched him. His owner looked surprised.

"I'd never taake you fur a smith," he remarked; "leastways, not wud your coat on."

"I'm not a smith. I'm a Minister of the Gospel."

The men winked at each other and hid their mouths. Then one of them asked suddenly:

"Are you the Rev. Mr. Sumption from Sunday Street?"

"Reckon I am. Do you know me?"

"I doan't know you, surely; but we've all heard as the minister of Sunday Street can shoe a horse wud any smith, and postwoman wur saying this marnun as he'd gone off nobody knows whur, after telling all his folk in a sermon as they'd started the War."

Mr. Sumption looked uncomfortable.

"I only went for a bit of a tramp, and lost my way . . . I've no call to be home before sundown—so, if you've

any use for me, master, I can stop and give you a hand this afternoon."

The smith was willing enough, for he was hard-pressed, and the fame of the Reverend Mr. Sumption had spread far beyond the country of the Four Roads. The strength of his great arms, his resource, his knowledge, his experience of all smithwork, made him an even more valuable assistant than the man who had gone. There was a market that day at Chiddingly, which meant more work than usual, including several wheelwright's jobs, which the smith performed himself, leaving the horses to Mr. Sumption. The furnace roared as the bellows gasped, and lit up all the sag-roofed forge, with the dark shapes of men and horses standing round, and the minister holding down the red-hot iron among the coals or beating it on the anvil, while his sweating skin was shiny and crimson in the glow.

It was like his dream of the forge at Bethersden—and he felt almost happy. The glow of his body seemed to reach his heart and warm it, and his head was no longer full of doubts like stones. He had found a refuge here, as he had found it in old days in Mus' Bournier's forge at Sunday Street—the heat, the roar, the flying sparks, the shaking crimson light, the smell of sweat and hoofs and horse-hide, the pleasant ache of labour in his limbs, were all part of the healing which had begun when he rubbed his cheek against the wet soil on the common. His religion had always taught him to look on his big friendly body as his enemy, to subdue and thwart and ignore it. He had not known till then how much it was his friend, and that there is such a thing as the Redemption of the Body, the mystic act through which the body saves and redeems the soul.

He worked on till the sun grew pale, and a tremulous primrose light crept over the fields of Lion's Green, swamping the trees and hedges and grazing cows. The afternoon was passing into the evening, and Mr. Sump-

tion knew he must start at once if he was to be home that day.

"Well, I'm middling sorry to lose you," said the smith. "A man lik you's wasted preaching the Gospel."

"Reckon I shan't do much more of that," said Mr. Sumption wryly. "I can't go back to my Bethel, after what's happened."

"Well, if ever you feel you'd lik to turn blacksmith fur a change——" the smith remarked, with a grin.

"I shall go into the Army Veterinary Corps," said Mr. Sumption.

"Wot! Lik my man?"

"Like the man I was meant to be. I agree with you, master—I'm wasted preaching the Gospel. I'd be better as a veterinary . . . I've been thinking. . . ."

15

There was a farmer driving as far as Adam's Hole on the Hailsham Road, and he offered Mr. Sumption a lift in his trap. The minister had shod his little sorrel mare, and with her hoofs ringing on the clinkered road they drove from Lion's Green, away towards the east. The dipping sun poured upon their backs, flooding the lane and washing along their shadows ahead of them into the swale. The east was still bright, and out of it crept the moon, frail and papery, like the petal of a March flower.

The little mare spanked quickly over the way on her new-shod hoofs. Through Soul Street and Horeham Flat, by Badbrooks and Coarse Horn on the lip of the Marsh rolled the trap, with the minister nearly silent and the farmer talking about the War—till the oasts of Adam's Hole showed their red turrets against a wood, and, declining an invitation to step in and hear half a dozen more good reasons why the Germans would never get the Channel Ports, Mr. Sumption tramped off to where the East Road swung into the flats.

The sun was now low, and the sunk light touched the moon, so that her smudged arc kindled and shone out of the cold dimness. Red and yellow gleams wavered over the country of the Four Roads, sweeping up the meadows towards Three Cups Corner, and lighting the woods that blotched the chimneys of Brownbread Street. He saw Sunday Street slitting the hill with a red gape, and the sheen of the ponds by Puddledock, and the flare of gorse and broom on Magham Down. There was a great clearness and cleanness in the watery air, so that he could see the roofs of farmsteads far away and little cottages standing alone like toadstools in the fields. Sounds came clearly, too—there was a great clucking on all the farms, and the lowing of cows; now and then the bark of a dog came sharply from a great way off, sheep called their lambs in the meadows by Harebeating, and a boy was singing reedily at Cowlease Farm. . . .

It was all very still, very lovely, steeped through with the spirit of peace—not even the beat of the guns could be heard to-night. These were the fields for which the boys in France had died, the farms and lanes they had sealed in the possession of their ancient peace by a covenant signed in blood. As Mr. Sumption looked round him at the country slowly sinking into the twilight, a little of its quiet crept into his heart. These were the fields for which the boys had died. They had not died for England—what did they know of England and the British Empire? They had died for a little corner of ground which was England to them, and the sprinkling of poor common folk who lived in it. Before their dying eyes had risen not the vision of England's glory, but just these fields he looked on now, with the ponds, and the woods, and the red roofs . . . and the women and children and old people who lived among them—the very same whom last night he had scolded and cursed, told they were scarce worth preaching at. For the first time he felt ashamed of that affair. He

might not think them worth preaching at, but other men, and better men, had found them worth dying for.

Then, as he walked on towards Pont's Green, he saw these fields as the eternal possession of the boys who had died—bought by their blood. The country of the Four Roads was theirs for ever—they had won it; and this was true not only of the honoured Tom but of the dishonoured Jerry. For the first time he felt at rest about his son. "Somewhere the love of God is holding him. . . ." He could not picture him in heaven, and he would not picture him in hell; but now he could see him as part of the fields that he, in his indirect shameful way, had died for. Surely his gipsy soul could find rest in their dawns and twilights, in the infinite calm of their noons. . . . Jerry would be near him at the pond side, in the meadow, in the smoke of the forge, in the murmur and shade of the wood . . . and the cool winds blowing from the sea would wipe off his dishonour.

16

The lanes were empty, for it was supper-time on the farms. A pale green was washing the rim of the sky, and the starlight shook among the ash-trees that trembled beside the road. Faint scents of hidden primroses stole up from the banks with the vital sweetness of the new-sown ploughlands. It was growing cold, and Mr. Sumption walked briskly. When he came to Pont's Green he thought he saw the back of old Hubble tottering on ahead, so he slackened his pace a little, for he hoped to get home without meeting any of his congregation. The feeling of shame was growing, he felt as if he had despised Christ's little ones . . . after all, who shall be found big enough to fit the times? What man is built to the stature of Doomsday?

He heard himself called as he entered the village,

and turning his head, saw Thyrza standing in the shop door, the last light gleaming on her apron.

“ Mus’ Sumption !—is that you ? ”

He thought of going on, pretending not to hear ; but there was a gentleness in Thyrza’s voice which touched him. He remembered the message she had sent him yesterday morning. “ She’s a kind soul,” he thought, and stopped.

“ Oh, Mus’ Sumption—whur have you bin ? ”

Her hand closed warmly on his, and her eyes travelled over him in eagerness and pity.

“ I’ve been over to Lion’s Green,” said Mr. Sumption. “ I couldn’t lie quiet at the Horselunges last night. I reckon tongues are wagging a bit.”

“ Reckon they are—but we’ll all be just about glad to see you back. I went up only this afternoon and asked Policeman if he cud do aught. Come in to the fire—you look middling tired.”

“ I’ve been working at the smith’s over at Lion’s Green all the afternoon,” said the minister proudly.

“ Surely ! Everyone knows wot a valiant smith you maake ; but come in and have a bite of supper. The fire’s bright and the kettle’s boiling, and thur’s a bit of bacon in the pan.”

Mr. Sumption’s mouth watered. He had had nothing that dây except the bread and tea provided at the inn, and it was not likely that Mrs. Hubble would have much of a meal awaiting him. True, it was doubtful morality to encroach on Thyrza’s bacon ration, but Thyrza herself encouraged the lapse, pulling at his hand, and opening the shop door behind her, so that his temptations might be reinforced by the smell of cooking.

“ Come in, and you shall have the best rasher you ever ate in your life—and eggs and hot tea and a bit of pudden and a fire to your feet.”

She led him through the shop, whence the bottles of sweets had vanished long ago, and the empty spaces

were filled with large cardboard posters, displaying Thyrza's licence to sell margarine, and the Government list of prices—through into the little back room, where the firelight covered the walls with nodding spindles, and little Will lay in his cradle fast asleep.

"I have him in here fur company like," said Thyrza. "Reckon he sleeps as well as in the bed, and it aun't so lonesome fur me."

For the first time he heard her sorrow drag at her voice, and noticed, as, manlike, he had not done before, her widow's dress with its white collar and cuffs.

"God bless you, Mrs. Tom," he said, and she turned quickly away from him to the fire.

For some minutes there was silence, broken only by the humming of the kettle and the hiss of fat in the pan. Mr. Sumption lay back in an armchair, more tired than he would care to own. The window was uncurtained, and in the square of it he saw the big stars of the Wain . . . according to the lore both of the country of the Four Roads and of his old home in Kent, this was the waggon in which the souls of the dead rode over the sky, and that night he, in spite of his theological training, and Thyrza, in spite of her Board School education, both felt an echo of the old superstition in their hearts. Did Tom and Jerry ride there past the window, aloft and at rest in the great spaces, while those who loved them struggled on in the old fret and the new loneliness?

"I always kip the blind up till the last minnut," said Thyrza at the fire. "It aun't so lonesome fur me. Howsumdever, I've company to-night, and I mun git the lamp."

So the lamp was set on the table, and the blind came down and shut out Tom and Jerry on their heavenly ride. Mr. Sumption pulled his chair up to a big plate of eggs and bacon, with a cup of tea beside it, and fell to after the shortest grace Thyrza had ever heard from him.

"Reckon I'm hungry, reckon I'm tired—and you,

Mrs. Tom, are as the widow of Zarephath, who ministered to Elijah in the dearth. May you be rewarded and find your bacon ration as the widow's cruse this week."

He was beginning definitely to enjoy her company. Thyrsa's charm was of the comfortable, pervasive kind that attracted all sorts of men in every station. He found that he liked to listen to her soft, drawly voice, to watch her slow, heavy movements, to gaze at her tranquil face with the hair like flowering grass. She at once soothed and stimulated him. She encouraged him to talk, and when the edge was off his appetite, he did so, telling her a little of what had happened to him the last night and day.

"And what do you think I've learned by it all, Mrs. Tom? What do you think my trouble's taught me?"

Thyrsa shook her head. In her simple life trouble came and went without any lesson but its patient bearing.

"It's taught me I'm a blacksmith, and no minister."

"Reckon you're both," said Thyrsa.

"No—I'm not—I'm just the smith. And to prove it to you, from this day forward I shall not teach or preach another word."

"Wot! give up the Bethel!—not be minister here any more?"

"Not here nor anywhere. I'm no minister—I've never been a minister."

"But——"

"There's no good arguing. My mind's made up. I shall write to the Assembly this very night."

"Oh——"

"How shall I dare to teach and guide others, who could not even teach and guide my own son? No, don't interrupt me—the Lord has opened my eyes, and I see myself as just a poor, plain, ignorant man. Reckon I'm only the common blacksmith I was born and bred, and trying to make myself different has led to nothing but

pain and trouble, both for me and for others. I ask you what good has my ministry ever done a human soul ? ”

“ Oh, Mus’ Sumption, doan’t spik lik that,” said Thyrsa, with the tears in her eyes. “ Reckon I’ll never disremember how beautiful you talked of Tom last night . . . and oh, the comfort it guv me to hear you talk so ! ”

“ You’re a good soul, Missus—reckon there’s none I could speak to as I’m speaking to you now. But you mustn’t think high of me—I spoke ill last night ; I was like Peter before the Lord let down the sheet on him—calling His creatures common and unclean. I’ve failed as a minister, and I’ve failed as a father—the only thing I haven’t failed as is a blacksmith ; thank the Lord I’ve still some credit left at that.”

He hid his face for a moment. Thyrsa felt confused . . . she scarcely understood.

“ Then wot ull you do, Mus’ Sumption, if you mean to be minister no more ? ”

“ Join the A.V.C.—Army Veterinary Corps. I see as plain as daylight that’s my job.”

“ Wot ! Go and fight ? ”

“ Reckon there won’t be much fighting for a chap of my age. But I’ll be useful in my way. I hear they’re short of farriers and smiths. Besides, they’re calling up all fit men under fifty, and I can’t claim exemption as a minister, seeing I ain’t one ; and reckon Mr. Smith ull go now Randall Cantuar and Charles John Chichester have said he may. . . . So I’m off to Lewes to-morrow, Mrs. Tom.”

“ We shall miss you unaccountable. Besides, it aun’t the life fur a man lik you.”

He laughed. “ That’s just where you’re wrong—it’s the very proper life for a man like me, it’s the life I should have been leading the last thirty years. Howsoever, it’s not too late to mend, and reckon I’ll be glad to have my part in the big job at last. Here’s thirty

years that I've been preaching the Day of the Lord, and now's my chance of helping that day through a bit."

He stood up and pushed back his chair.

"Oh, doan't be going yit, Mus' Sumption."

"Reckon I must—I've all sorts of things to do. Don't be sorry for me—I'm doing the happiest thing I ever did as well as the best. I'll be doing the work I was born for, and I'll be helping the world through judgment, and I'll be doing what I owe my boy—your boy—all the boys that are dead."

Thyrza's eyes filled with tears when he spoke of Tom. For a moment he seemed to forget his surroundings, and to fancy himself back in the pulpit he had renounced, for he held up his hand and his voice came throatily :

"Behold the day cometh that shall burn as an oven ; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly shall be as stubble. But unto you that fear My name shall the Sun of Righteousness arise with healing in His wings. And He shall turn the heart of the fathers to their children, and the heart of the children to their fathers. . . . Oh, Thyrza, the world is sown over-with young, brave lives, and it's our job to see that they are not as the seed scattered by the wayside, sown in vain. Reckon we must water them with our tears and manure them with our works, and so we shall quicken the harvest of Aeldama, when our beloved shall rise again. . . ."

His voice strangled a little ; then he continued in his ordinary tones :

"That's why I'm joining up. I owe it to Jerry—to finish what he began. By working hard, and submitting to orders, as he could never do, poor soul, maybe I'll be able to clear off the debt he owed. He shall rise again in his father's effort. . . ."

Thyrza was crying now. "And Tom ?" she asked in her tears—"I want to do summat for him, too, Mus' Sumption. How shall Tom rise up agaun ?"

He pointed to the cradle at her feet :

“There’s your Tom—risen again both for you and for his country. Take him and be comforted.”

She sank down on her knees beside the cradle, hiding her face under the hood, and he turned and left her, stalking out through the shop into the darkness.

Crouching there in the firelight, with her baby held warm and heavy against her breast, she heard his tread grow fainter and fainter, till at last only an occasional throb of wind brought her the footsteps of the lonely man upon the road.

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